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# *Changing Ecologies of War and Humanitarianism: Reflecting on MSF's 40 years of working in conflict*

*May 4<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup>, 2016*

*Two-day conference organized by Médecins Sans  
Frontières, AUB's Faculty of Health Sciences,  
and AUB's Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy  
and International Affairs*



Issam Fares Institute for Public  
Policy and International Affairs

معهد عصام فارس للسياسات  
العامة والشؤون الدولية

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# Background

MSF's first project responding to conflict was inaugurated in Beirut in 1976. Since then, the organization has worked in major conflict zones across the world and has grown in size to navigate the medical, political and social realities of providing healthcare during war. While the demand for humanitarian aid grows, MSF's ability to work in conflict zones faces compounding obstacles and challenges.

In recent decades, MSF has been at the forefront of responding to protracted conflicts and humanitarian crises in the Middle East and North Africa. Unfortunately, many of these projects have been forced to close down due to the changing political realities and conditions of war in certain locations. In 2013, MSF announced the closure of all its programs in Somalia because of increasing attacks on its staff. In 2014, the growing insecurity in post-Kaddafi Libya forced MSF to withdraw from the country. In Syria, following the kidnapping of five staff members in January 2014, the organization suspended most of its activities in opposition-held areas. At the same time, access has been systematically denied in government-controlled parts of the country.

In 2015, MSF faced the biggest loss of life in a single airstrike when the U.S. attacked and destroyed one of the most important and largest trauma hospitals in Afghanistan. Subsequent attacks on MSF-run and supported health facilities in Syria and Yemen have further highlighted the limits of international humanitarian law in preventing such attacks given the changing nature of war.

While the challenges facing MSF pale in comparison to the reality of life in war for people trapped in brutal conflict, the ability of MSF to work, or lack thereof, is often an indicator of the broader processes entailed in the provision of assistance amid the disregard for civilian life and infrastructure in conflict zones around the world.

A two-day conference, to be held jointly between AUB and MSF, will critically examine some of the contemporary challenges to humanitarian action across different war geographies within and beyond the Middle East. The event will bring together researchers, academics, and practitioners working in and on the humanitarian sector to reflect on the changing conditions of warfare and humanitarian aid in light of the militarization of healthcare – its targeting and implication in war – massive population movements, and the rapid regionalization of health delivery in contemporary conflicts.

This event is part of a series of activities in Beirut marking 40-years of MSF working in conflict, in addition to AUB celebrating its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The event is co-organized by MSF, the War and Global Health Working Group at the Faculty of Health Sciences and the Issam Fares Institute.

## Outline of the event

This event will provide a platform for academics and practitioners to reflect on the changing dynamics of contemporary war and challenges facing the provision of healthcare in conflict. The event will take place over two days and will include a series of panel discussions and keynote addresses. Participants will be invited to engage in an active and lively discussion on the key themes and draw on lessons learnt that shape the future of research on healthcare under conflict and the practice of humanitarian aid.

The panels are organized around four main themes:

- The changing histories and landscapes of humanitarian aid
- The targeting and implication of medicine in warfare
- Responding to populations on the move
- Emerging global health trends in contemporary conflict

# Program

## Wednesday 4 May

10h00 – 11h00

### Welcoming remarks

Iman Nuwayhid, Dean of AUB's Faculty of Health Sciences & Tarek Mitri, Director of AUB's Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs

### Organizers remarks

Jonathan Whittall, MSF Head of Humanitarian Analysis & Omar Dewachi, AUB Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Global Health

11h00 – 12h00

### Key note address: 40 years of working in conflict - the MSF perspective

Meinie Nicolai (MSF President of Operational Centre Brussels)

12h00 – 13h15

### Break

13h15 – 15h15

### Panel 1: The changing histories and landscapes of humanitarian aid

- Chair: Jonathan Whittall (MSF)
- Mark Duffield (Bristol)
- Stephen Hopgood (SOAS)
- Discussant: Lisa Hajjar (AUB)

The institutional forms of humanitarian aid largely have their roots in Western power and institutions. The primary donors of the humanitarian system largely remain Western governments. However, this is starting to change as Western power declines. This panel will explore the ways in which the history of humanitarian aid has affected and exacerbated the current challenges of aid delivery, and will explore the way in which humanitarian aid is being rethought in light of changing political landscapes.

15h15 – 15h30

### Coffee break

15h30 – 17h30

### Panel 2: War on medicine - The targeting and implication of medicine in warfare

- Chair: Fouad Fouad (AUB)
- Françoise Bouchet Saulnier (MSF)
- Roger Normand (Harvard)
- Discussant: Rania El Rajji (MSF)

Recent attacks on healthcare and humanitarian organizations in various conflict zones have raised many concerns. Such attacks should not be seen as individual incidents. They are part of broader global and local processes that reveal the different paradoxes inherent in the ongoing "war on terror" and the increasing militarization of healthcare in contemporary conflicts. This panel explores the various ways in which healthcare has come under fire and seeks to address how the provision of healthcare can be better protected.

## Thursday 5 May

### **10h00 – 12h00**      **Panel 3: Populations on the move and the regionalization of healthcare**

- Chair: Nasser Yassin (AUB's Issam Fares Institute)
- Michiel Hofman (MSF)
- Omar Dewachi (AUB)
- Discussant: Kareem Shaheen (The Guardian)

Conflicts in the Middle East have resulted in massive population displacement and have shaped the ways in which people are able to move or are trapped, and therefore their ability to access healthcare and aid. This panel explores the relations between the conditions of mobility and immobility and the effects of such movement on the reconfiguration of healthcare delivery within and across state borders.

### **12h00 – 12h30**      **Announcement: Conflict Medicine in AUB's Health Vision**

### **12h30 – 13h45**      **Break**

### **13h45 – 15h45**      **Panel 4: Emerging global health trends in contemporary conflicts in the Middle East**

- Chair and discussant: Ghassan Abu Sitta (AUB)
- Abdulrahman al Bizri (AUB)
- Jesse Berns (DHARMA)
- Vinh-Kim Nguyen (University of Montréal)

The proliferation of conflicts across the Middle East has given rise to different forms of physical, psychological and social injuries. This panel builds on the notion of the 'war wound' to explore a broad range of often-neglected medical and global health challenges facing populations affected by conflict.

### **15h45 – 16h00**      **Coffee break**

### **16h00 – 17h00**      **Short video presentations by Richard Falk and Adam Habib, followed by an open discussion and closing remarks**

**Throughout the two-day conference there will be an ongoing exhibition and screening present at the Issam Fares Institute building, focusing on MSF's 40 years of working in conflict zones.**

# Biographies

**Meinie Nicolai** first worked with MSF in 1992, as a supervising nurse in Liberia. She has since gained a decade of field experience in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Somalia and South Sudan. Nicolai returned to the Netherlands to coordinate the national network on sexual and reproductive health and AIDS between 2002 and 2003, but her involvement with MSF continued as she became a board member of the Belgian association. In 2004, Nicolai became director of operations in the Brussels office until October 2010 when she was elected president of both MSF Belgium and MSF's operational directorate in Brussels.

**Mark Duffield** is an Emeritus Professor at the Global Insecurities Centre, University of Bristol and Honorary Professor, School of Government and Society, University of Birmingham. He has taught at the Universities of Khartoum, Aston, Birmingham, Leeds, Lancaster and Bristol. Outside of academia, he was Oxfam's Country Representative in Sudan during the latter half of the 1980s. Mark has extensive experience of conflict and humanitarian disasters in Africa, the Balkans and Afghanistan. His books include *Global Governance and the New Wars: the Merging of Development and Security* (2001, reissued 2014 in Zed Books prestigious *Critique, Influence, Change* series) and *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of People* (2007, reissued 2013). His current book project for Polity Press has the working title *Global Connectivity: Political Stagnation in a Polarising World*.

**Stephen Hopgood** is Professor of International Relations and co-Director of the Centre for the International Politics of Conflict, Rights and Justice at SOAS, University of London. He is the author of *The Endtimes of Human Rights* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), *Keepers of the Flame: Understanding Amnesty International* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 'Saying 'no' to Wal-Mart? Money and morality in professional humanitarianism,' in Michael Barnett and Thomas G Weiss (eds.) *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics* (Cornell University Press, 2008) and 'The last rites of humanitarian intervention: Darfur, Sri Lanka and R2P,' *Global Responsibility to Protect*, 6/2 (2014). Hopgood is also co-editor (with Jack Snyder and Leslie Vinjamuri) of the book *Human Rights Futures* (Cambridge University Press, *forthcoming*) in which he also has a chapter titled 'Human Rights: On the Road to Nowhere.' He is also a contributor to the website *openGlobalRights*, where his blog posts include 'Human rights: Past their sell-by date?' available at: <http://www.opendemocracy.net/openglobalrights/stephen-hopgood/human-rights-past-their-sell-by-date>.

**Lisa Hajjar** is a professor of sociology at the University of California – Santa Barbara. She was the Edward Said Chair of American Studies at the American University of Beirut in 2014 – 2015, and serves as the director of the Alwaleed Center for American Studies and Research (CASAR) at AUB in 2015 – 2016. Her work focuses mainly on issues relating to law and conflict, military courts and occupations, human rights and international law, and torture and targeted killing. Hajjar served for several terms as a member of the editorial committee of *Middle East Report*, and is one of the founding co-editors of *Jadaliyya*. She currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Middle East Studies Association.

**Jonathan Whittall** is currently Head of Humanitarian Analysis for Médecins Sans Frontières, where he established and coordinates the Humanitarian Innovation Team – an MSF reflection and analysis unit within the General Directorate in Brussels. In this role, he has worked extensively on providing strategic support to MSF operations in Afghanistan, Lebanon, Syria, Ukraine and South Sudan, among other conflict contexts. Whittall leads a team that conducts research and provides strategic operational support on the thematic of negotiated access, the challenges facing the aid system and refugees/migrants. He previously established and headed the organizations' Programmes Unit in his home town of Johannesburg, South Africa. Following this he was involved as an Emergency Coordinator in MSF's medical humanitarian responses in Libya, Bahrain and Syria. He has contributed to academic journals and newspapers on the politics of humanitarian aid. He holds a Master's degree in Humanitarian Studies and a PhD from the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. His PhD research was entitled 'A crisis of legitimacy for humanitarianism: In conflict situations how does the close relationship between Western power and humanitarian aid affect emergency response capacity and access for aid organisations?' Twitter Account: @offyourrecord

**Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier**, a Doctor of Law and magistrate, is Director of the International Legal Department of Médecins Sans Frontières. She is the author of several books and articles on humanitarian action, humanitarian law and international justice, in particular the Practical Guide to Humanitarian Law. She is involved in framing the rights and responsibilities of MSF humanitarian and medical activities in situations of armed conflict or internal tensions, as well as medical rights and duties when treating sick, wounded, and victims of sexual violence and interacting with judicial systems. In the past 20 years, she has been involved in developing key MSF policies and public positioning on humanitarian action and mass crimes, military intervention and international criminal justice. She is also a member of the Editorial Committee of the International Review of the Red Cross and of the Editorial Committee of the historical publication of MSF Speaking Out Case Studies.

**Roger Normand** has over 20 years' experience as a human rights advocate and professor. He was co-founder in 1993 of the Center for Economic and Social Rights, which focused on health, housing, education, and human rights. In 2003 he helped launch ESCR-Net, a web-based global network of CSOs, NGOs, activists and academics. Roger was Asia-Pacific Director for the International Commission of Jurists from 2008-11. Roger has taught law and justice at Columbia University and Lahore University, and has published widely on issues of rule of law, including a historical analysis of human rights: *Human Rights at the UN: the Politics of Universal Justice* (2009). He has a Bachelor of Arts (Middle East Politics) from Amherst College, a Juris Doctor (International Law) from Harvard Law School, and an MTS (Theological Studies) from Harvard Divinity School.

**Fouad M. Fouad** is a Syrian physician and general surgeon by training. Currently, he's an assistant research professor at the Faculty of Health Sciences, American University of Beirut. Before moving to Lebanon due to the current war in Syria, he was the coordinator and researcher at the NIH-funded tobacco and public health research center in Aleppo, Syria. His research interest at FHS/AUB is Syrian displacement inside Syria and in the neighboring countries; and the impact of crisis on their well-being. Moreover, he's doing research on the role of the international organizations in national health systems within crisis. Fouad is the main author of a chapter on health in *The National Agenda for the Future of Syria*, UN-ESCWA."

**Rania El Rajji** is MSF's MENA Humanitarian Advisor based out of Beirut. El Rajji has worked mostly in the East Africa/Horn of Africa, and the MENA region over the last 14 years, with various international organizations including Amnesty International, the UN Panel of Experts on Sudan, Oxfam, Minority Rights Group International, and MSF. She is trained as a lawyer and specialized in human rights. Most of her work has been around international humanitarian law and human rights in conflict. Her work greatly focused on torture, migration and minority issues.

**Michiel Hofman** is senior humanitarian specialist for MSF based out of Belfast, with a focus on research, training and operational support as well as publications in the humanitarian field. He has worked for MSF in field missions between 1993 and 1998 as Emergency Co-ordinator and Head of Mission for MSF in Liberia, DRC, Bosnia, Burundi, Sri Lanka, Brazil, South Sudan and Kosovo, returning to his former career as freelance journalist in between missions. Between 1999 and 2001, Michiel co-founded *The Antares Foundation*, a Dutch non-profit organization which supports local NGOs in providing psycho-social support for staff working in high-stress environments. Michiel returned to MSF in 2001 working as Country Director..in Russia, Operations Director in Amsterdam, and Country Director for Afghanistan.

**Nasser Yassin** is the Director of Research at AUB's Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs and Assistant Professor of Policy and Planning at the Department of Health Management and Policy at the Faculty of Health Sciences, AUB. His research and practice interests are within the area of public policy-making and governance in countries and societies in transition, with emphasis on social and health policies, poverty alleviation and youth policies. Yassin is also an advisor to the UNDP. He holds a PhD in Development Planning from University College London and an MSc in Development Studies from the London School of Economics.

Twitter Account: [@nasseryassin](https://twitter.com/nasseryassin)

**Omar Dewachi** is Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Global Health at the American University of Beirut. Trained as a physician in Iraq during the 1990s, Dewachi received his doctorate in social anthropology from

Harvard University in 2008. His research explores the social and medical consequences of war in the Middle East with a focus on Iraq. He leads the War and Global Health Working Group at AUB and was one of the contributors to the Costs of War Project at Brown University. His manuscript, *Ungovernable Life: War and Mandatory Medicine in Iraq* is forthcoming with Stanford University Press, Spring 2017. The book is based on archival and ethnographic research, chronicling the politics of medicine and statecraft in Iraq from the British mandate (1920-1932) through the US occupation (2003-2011). He is currently conducting ethnographic research on the *ecologies of wounds and wounding* in an increasingly militarized Middle East. The project examines the experiences of patients, doctors and institutions with war afflictions, displacements, and the reconfigurations of healthcare geographies across the East of the Mediterranean states.

**Kareem Shaheen** is a Middle East reporter for The Guardian newspaper, based in Beirut. He covers a wide range of countries in the region, including Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and Turkey. He holds a Master's degree in war studies from King's College London.

**Ghassan Abu Sitta** is the head of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at the American University of Beirut Medical Center (AUBMC). A graduate of the University of Glasgow, Faculty of Medicine in 1994, he has worked in conflict zones from Iraq in 1991, South Lebanon in 1996, Palestine during the first and second Intifada, and in the Gaza Strip during the last three wars. He has an academic interest in the reconstruction of war-injured patients.

**Abdul Rahman Bizri** is a consultant in Internal Medicine and Infectious Diseases at the American University of Beirut Medical Center (AUBMC) and the Director of Quality Program at the Department of Internal Medicine. Served as the chairperson of the Infection Control Program and Infection Control Committee at AUBMC till 2005 and established many infection control programs in various teaching medical centers both private and governmental. He has more than 75 publications on antibiotic resistance, and the changing epidemiology of infectious diseases mainly Salmonella, rabies, viral hepatitis, HIV/AIDS, invasive mycosis, microbiology of war related infections, and refugee medicine. Bizri is a member of the editorial boards of many international and regional journals, and serves as a WHO expert and advisor on infectious and transmissible diseases. He has a special interest in infections in conflict situation and produced a number of manuscripts about the impact of the Syrian war on infectious diseases in Lebanon and the region.

**Jesse E. Berns** is the CEO of The Dharma Platform, a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) product which allows users regardless of technical literacy and analytic knowledge, to rapidly turn data into action. She received epidemiological and health informatics training at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Emergency Response Branch (CDC ERB) as a graduate researcher, as well as additional training received at University of California, Berkeley, including the use of statistical tools including the use of STATA, SAS, R, and other data analysis and intervention modeling programs. Prior to her current work in The Dharma Platform, she has had work experience with MSF as an Epidemiologist and Program Manager from 2013-2015, in which she created, designed and managed a large, comprehensive epidemiological program in several Middle East countries. She also was a technical advisor for the Ebola Mobile Data Collection Tool Project, developed between MSF and Google in 2014. Jesse has worked with the World Health Organization in Iraq as an Epidemiologist Consultant/Principal Investigator where she designed, implemented, analyzed, and published a large household study in and around Domiz Camp and Duhok Governate.

**Vinh-Kim Nguyen** is an HIV and Emergency physician and medical anthropologist. As both practitioner and researcher, he is concerned with the relationship between science, politics and practice in global health. He practices Emergency Medicine at Avicenna Hospital in Paris and the Jewish General Hospital in Montréal, currently holds an ERC Consolidator Grant (Research Chair) on the science and politics of a world without AIDS and heads a team of anthropologists researching the Ebola epidemic in West Africa. He is Professor of Global Health at the University of Montréal and holds Chairs in Anthropology and Global Health at the Graduate Institute for International and Development Studies in Geneva and the Collège d'études mondiales in Paris. Since 1994 he has worked extensively with community organizations responding to the HIV epidemic in West Africa as a trainer and physician. He is the author of *The Republic of Therapy: Triage and Sovereignty in West Africa's Time of AIDS*; co-author, with Margaret Lock, of *An Anthropology of Biomedicine* and also the co-editor, with Jennifer Klot, of *The Fourth Wave: Violence, Gender, Culture, and HIV in the 21st Century*, as well as numerous articles in biomedical and anthropological journals.