

MÉDECINS SANS FRONTIÈRES (MSF) IRELAND CORPORATE GIFT ACCEPTANCE POLICY

As a humanitarian medical aid organisation MSF strongly believes that we must not accept gifts from corporations or industries whose activities are in conflict with our humanitarian goals and values, as set out in the MSF Charter:

Médecins Sans Frontières offers assistance to populations in distress, to victims of natural or man-made disasters and to victims of armed conflict, without discrimination and irrespective of race, religion, creed or political affiliation.

Médecins Sans Frontières observes neutrality and impartiality in the name of universal medical ethics and the right to humanitarian assistance and demands full and unhindered freedom in the exercise of its functions.

Médecins Sans Frontières' volunteers undertake to respect their professional code of ethics and to maintain complete independence from all political, economic and religious powers.

As volunteers, members are aware of the risks and dangers of the mission they undertake, and have no right to compensation for themselves or their beneficiaries other than that which Médecins Sans Frontières is able to afford them.

MSF IRELAND does not accept gifts from corporations and industries (including small businesses, companies, multinationals and corporate foundations etc), that are in the following categories:

A) TOBACCO, ALCOHOL, ARMS MANUFACTURING

The reasoning behind the refusal of corporate funds from the tobacco, alcoholic beverage, and arms manufacturing industries is straightforward. A business whose activities or products damages health or cause human suffering is in conflict with the principles and values of the MSF charter. Tobacco and alcoholic beverage corporations should not be associated with an organisation committed to public health and medical ethics. The arms industry not only provides the means to cause human suffering, but any association with this industry could compromise the independence or the perception thereof, from "all political, economic, and religious influences."

B) MINERAL, OIL, GAS AND OTHER EXTRACTION INDUSTRIES

Mining and oil companies have inherent characteristics that conflict with the values of MSF and its charter. These conflicts of interest prevent MSF from accepting contributions or associating with these companies in good conscience, regardless of the companies' intentions. Acceptance of support from the extraction industry not only conflicts with the MSF Charter, but it could also seriously compromise the security of volunteers in the field.

Last to leave

Oil, gold, diamonds, and other natural resources are a source of profit for these companies no matter where they are found. Mining and drilling operations are generally long-term and can last twenty years or more. The costs of abandoning such an investment are high since the value of a natural resource does not change in the midst of a war or other political or economic crises. If one company leaves, a competitor will quickly step in to take its place. This often leads extraction firms to deal with and support regimes that have poor human rights records. The characteristic of being the "last to leave" distinguishes the extraction industry from other multinational industries that rely on stability such as banking or manufacturing. A bank will pack up and leave, for business reasons, long before an oil company.

Fuelling conflict

The high cost of pulling out provides extraction firms with an incentive to co-operate with undemocratic and repressive governments. Armed conflicts in unstable regions often stem from disputes about control of natural resources. Recent examples where natural resources, diamonds in particular, have played a clear role have been in Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Angola. The mere presence of foreign oil or mining companies in war zones forces them to take sides. Even if the companies are not present in the country, they may be used by the armed factions to sell their finds on the international market. Association with such companies therefore compromises MSF's principle of strict neutrality, impartiality, and independence from economic forces.

Population displacement

Because mining and drilling operations must be where the resources lie, there is a strong likelihood of population displacement. Oil companies, in particular, have been complicit in the forced displacement of people where there are oil fields or pipelines. Examples of this have been documented by NGOs, most recently in Sudan. Accepting support from firms that directly or indirectly lead to the displacement of populations that MSF endeavours to help undoubtedly violates the spirit of the Charter.

Public perception

Another major reason to not accept support from companies in the extraction industry is public perception. High profile cases of firms contributing to human rights violations by governments or fuelling armed conflicts have been recently brought to the forefront by other NGOs. Any perception by the public that MSF is backed by firms that either take sides in a conflict or support human rights violations could directly and adversely affect the security of MSF volunteers in the field.

C) PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY

Accepting corporate funding from the pharmaceutical industry, particularly members of the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association (IFPMA), would put MSF in a compromising position with respect to MSF's Access to Essential Medicines Campaign. The IFPMA, as a body, objects to parallel imports and compulsory licensing, supports uniformly high prices, and sets a profit-driven research & development agenda, all of which counter the objectives of the campaign. Companies who donate to MSF could potentially undermine the Campaign against their practices by announcing their support of the organisation in publicity materials, annual reports, and speeches. MSF does engage in dialogue and negotiations with pharmaceutical companies in order to find the most practical solutions for populations in danger. However, the appearance of accepting corporate funds or entering into public relations-driven "sponsorship" arrangements with members of the pharmaceutical industry would be hypocritical, and could potentially endanger more long-term, sustainable solutions to the access crisis.