Chatham House Prize 2015: Award Dinner

HRH The Princess Royal

Dr Joanne Liu
International President, Médecins Sans Frontières

Andrew Brown OBE
Upstream International Director, Royal Dutch Shell

Dr Jeremy Farrar OBE
Director, Wellcome Trust

Stuart Popham QC
Chairman, Chatham House

Chair: Dr Robin Niblett CMG
Director, Chatham House

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Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, Lords, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Chatham House 2015 Prize Award Dinner. As I think many of you who have joined us before know, this is the Royal Institute of International Affairs' most important evening of the year. With the Banqueting Hall under renovation, this is the first time the Institute has held the award dinner here at Plaisterers Hall. We're delighted that so many of the Institute's valued friends, supporters and guests are here tonight with us in this beautiful venue, including members of the Chatham House Council, our panel of Senior Advisers and our Second Century Committee, members of the UK government and opposition, and representatives of London's vibrant diplomatic corps, civil society community and the corporate sector.

I'd particularly like to thank the sponsors of this evening's event, led by Shell, who have once again, since the beginning of this prize eleven years ago, been so generous in enabling us to do justice to this special occasion. Each of our sponsors is recognized in the programme and I hope you will take the time to read through their messages of good wishes to this year's prize winner, Médecins Sans Frontières, represented here this evening by their international president, Dr Joanne Liu.

The Chatham House Prize, as I said, is now in its eleventh year. It is presented to the person or, as we see here for the first time in the prize's history, the organization deemed by Chatham House members to have made the most significant contribution to the improvement of international relations in the previous year. To do this, our researchers at Chatham House at the start of each year nominate individuals or organizations from their areas of research whom they believe are worthy of the prize. Our three presidents – this year, Lord Ashdown, Sir John Major and Baroness Scotland – review the list of names and agree upon the short list.

I should point out that Paddy Ashdown’s term as president ended in July, after ten years. We've benefitted enormously from his experience, his guidance and, for those of you who have participated in these dinners, his great speeches as well. But I'm delighted that Baroness Eliza Manningham-Buller, who is with us tonight, was elected by members of Chatham House to be the new president of Chatham House and succeeds Lord Ashdown.

After the presidents have agreed on the short list, it's our members who then vote to select the winner through a secret ballot. I think you'll agree it's this process of nomination, review, selection and election that makes this prize unique amongst its kind.

I'm delighted therefore that in this, our eleventh anniversary year, our members voted to award the Chatham House 2015 Prize to Médecins Sans Frontières. MSF is awarded the prize in recognition of the organization's life-saving work in West Africa in 2014 to halt the spread of the Ebola virus and treat to save thousands of lives. The outbreak of Ebola in West Africa was the largest and longest in history. True to one of the main principles contained in the movement's charter – to provide assistance to populations in distress, to victims of natural or manmade disasters, and to victims of armed conflict, and to do irrespective of race, religion, creed or political convictions – MSF was amongst the very first groups to respond to the outbreak in 2014. It remained steadfastly engaged on the ground throughout the entire crisis, caring for the majority of patients in the most affected countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. During the first year of response, MSF's field centres, with their dedicated doctors, nurses and logistical staff, admitted over 8,500 patients. Over 5,000 were confirmed to have Ebola, and from these over 2,400 received care and survived. Unfortunately, in responding to the crisis, 28 MSF staff members fell ill with Ebola; 14 recovered but 14 died.
Equally important, MSF alerted the entire world, warning early in the crisis that the outbreak was totally out of control and calling for a stronger international response. On the 8th of August, 2014, just a week after Dr Liu, as international president, appealed for it, the World Health Organization declared the outbreak an international health emergency. In September, Dr Liu addressed the UN Security Council, calling on behalf of the organization for military support and aid, including expertise on biohazard containment to tackle the epidemic. Soon after that appeal, medical and military personnel and equipment from a range of nations were mobilized in significant numbers.

Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, Lords, ladies and gentlemen, today we are again faced with developments that remind us all so shockingly of the risks that MSF staff face in meeting their mission in some of the most dangerous and difficult operating environments in the world. Less than two weeks ago, 12 MSF staff were among the 22 persons killed in airstrikes on the MSF hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan. Thirty-seven others were injured, including nineteen from the MSF team that were so bravely on the ground. Thousands are now without the care they need, including life and limb-saving trauma care.

So I would ask you to now stand for one minute’s silence, as a mark of respect for the victims of the Ebola outbreak and so recently those who lost their lives, including MSF staff, in the attack on the MSF hospital in Kunduz on the 3rd of October.

It is now my great pleasure to introduce the Princess Royal, who will present the prize to Dr Liu on behalf of our patron, Her Majesty the Queen. In addition to her many charitable activities, Her Royal Highness has a particular knowledge of Africa and the importance of health and humanitarian support there, in her role since 1970 as president of Save the Children UK. We're delighted that she's joined us again to award the Chatham House Prize this year to Médecins Sans Frontières. Thank you very much, Your Royal Highness.

**HRH The Princess Royal**

Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, I'm delighted to join you once again here at Chatham House and for this very special event, the Chatham House Prize. It was only launched in 2005 but the combination of Chatham House’s reputation, the regard for the United Kingdom and the respect for the Queen, I think has ensured that the prize has rapidly gained recognition in the international affairs community as a valuable and prestigious award.

The fact that this year's has been awarded to Médecins Sans Frontières is perhaps indicative of the rather changing nature of international relations, and how we are less likely to look to individuals or even small groups of leaders alone to resolve our problems. Increasingly, the civil society, business, academic institutions, philanthropic organizations and indeed guests here this evening, are playing important roles in enacting change and making a real difference to people's lives.

This year, Chatham House members have recognized Médecins Sans Frontières as an organization that has made a difference. They led the global response to the Ebola outbreak, and together with their partners saved thousands of lives in the process. As we all know from recent tragic events in Kunduz, they are at the forefront of humanitarian endeavour in that troubled region of the world. I’m delighted that Chatham House has chosen to perhaps recognize and understand the role that NGOs play, not only of what they have achieved, as recognized tonight, but the potential for many of what they can achieve in the future. They have a real impact on international relations and the ability to make a difference.
I am honoured to read the message from Her Majesty the Queen, as patron of Chatham House, in which she says: ‘I send my warmest wishes and congratulations to Dr Joanne Liu and Médecins Sans Frontières on being awarded this year’s Chatham House Prize for the lifesaving work that helped identify and combat the outbreak of Ebola in West Africa. Members of the Royal Institute of International Affairs have chosen a worthy winner’. 

So it is my great pleasure to present the award and a scroll signed by Her Majesty the Queen to the winner of the Chatham House Prize 2015, Médecins Sans Frontières.

**Joanne Liu**

Good evening. Your Royal Highness, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank all the members of Chatham House for giving this prestigious prize to MSF tonight. I stand here before you representing thousands of MSF staff from all over the world who responded to Ebola. But the burden fell on West Africans, whoever they work for. Their selfless dedication to tackling this lethal outbreak deserve honour, for they paid a terrible price. Hundreds of front-line workers died, including 14 of my colleagues. It is in their memory that I receive this award tonight.

Ebola is an acute and brutal virus ripping through families, communities and those caring for the sick. Ebola first emerged 40 years ago, yet health care workers still cannot offer their patients point-of-care diagnosis, treatment or vaccines. Championing research and development between epidemics is key for better preparation.

With policies of containment and political calculus in play, fear spiralled out of hand. It led to bans on vital air traffic and politically motivated quarantines. Many governments wasted months when urgent action was required. Patients and their communities should have been at the heart of the response from the beginning, but only when sick people landed in the US and Europe did the world pay attention.

The world is finally paying attention again as a global exodus bangs on Europe's gates. Not since World War II have we seen population movements of this complexity and scale. But this tide will not turn. These people are fleeing conflict, brutality, disease, hunger and poverty.

War has become a free-for-all that only the fittest can survive, but even wars have rules. The Geneva Convention negotiated in the wake of World War II protects civilians in conflict: patients, medical workers and facilities cannot be targeted. This set of rules brings some humanity into otherwise inhuman situations. Yet on Saturday, October 3rd, MSF's trauma centre in Kunduz, Afghanistan, was bombed over and over again. Our patients burned in their beds. At least 22 lost their lives, 3 of them children; 12 MSF doctors, nurses and other staff were killed as they worked. One of our doctors died on a makeshift operating table, an office desk, while his colleague tried to save his life. This hospital was the only facility of its kind in the region of Afghanistan. It treated over 22,000 patients in 2014 alone.

We are calling for an independent investigation on this attack. We need to understand. We need to prevent this happening again. Please, stand with us and insist that health facilities and staff must be protected, that international humanitarian law must be upheld. For medical teams on the front line, it is the difference between life and death, the last buffer against total anarchy. Without it, our work in any war zone is compromised. Without it, men, women and children are left with no lifeline of support. Hospitals must not be bombed.
Our staff and patients in Kunduz join the countless number of people who have lost their lives in the chaos of Afghanistan, just as they do in South Sudan, Yemen, Syria and beyond. Who among us will find this condition acceptable for ourselves and our families? Is flight not a right, when all around has collapsed? Yet I was in Greece three weeks ago, seeing refugees from these countries sleeping in the European mud and cold without food or sanitation, while politicians of wealthy nations disgracefully compete to see how few they can take – how few.

We said in our Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 1999, ‘Humanitarian action is more than simple generosity, simple charity. More than offering material assistance, we aim to enable individuals to regain their rights and dignity as human beings’. Humanitarianism is not a tool to end war or to create peace. It is a citizen’s response to political failure. It is an immediate short-term act that cannot erase the long-term necessity of political responsibility.

As whole regions are rocked by political polarization and violence, MSF will continue with our work for which the Chatham House Prize is gratefully received. But as we celebrate this evening, I ask you to think of those facing imminent danger in lethal outbreaks, in war zones or in flight. Some are packed into leaky boats on the sea right now, as we are gathered here to dine. However effective and necessary, MSF assistance to them can only be a stopgap. Lasting solutions must be found. These lie in political leaders’ hands – your hands. Thank you.

[Viewing of video about MSF activities.]

Andrew Brown

Your Excellencies, Lords, ladies and gentlemen: in just over a year, 28,000 people were infected by Ebola in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia. Eleven thousand or more of those, by official figures, died from the disease. It is not just the devastating loss of life, it is the impact on the economies of those nations, which were paralysed by the disease and hit the standards of living of millions of people. It’s a cruel disease. It has terrifying mortality rates. It’s a disease where those infected need to be isolated when they need human care.

That’s why I think this particular award to Médecins Sans Frontières is so well deserved. There are three things, as I think about, that really distinguishes them. First and clearly foremost is the courage and humanity of this organization. Secondly, its professionalism. Thirdly, its international capabilities, and let me just address those three.

When they sounded the alarm about Ebola, hundreds of nationals ran to help. The stigma associated with that meant that those people not only put their lives at risk, but also had to leave their families behind and their friends cut them off. I visit Nigeria quite frequently. The fear in that region was palpable. We were faced with our own decisions on whether we evacuate people. So that courage, that humanity, that led to actually over 500 health workers dying, 14 from Médecins Sans Frontières, is such an extraordinary sacrifice that we need to honour them.

But it’s also their professionalism, their competence, their skills, their procedures, their protocols. Their ability to transfer knowledge and awareness that has saved many more lives and helped to halt the progression of the disease.

Thirdly, as an international company, I know what it takes to mobilize people to various countries around the world. They took 1,300 international staff into the region. They mobilized 4,000 nationals. They
treated 5,000 people that were infected and 2,400 walked out alive. This is an enormous logistic effort which any international company would be very proud of.

But today they have a portfolio of activities across the world in many difficult areas, such as in the Middle East, in Syria. Clearly, the tragedy in Kunduz earlier this month really just goes to show how vulnerable they are in these difficult parts of the world.

So as Shell, it's an honour to be part of this award. It's an honour to have a relationship with Chatham House that goes back to 1929. But it's an honour to be able to stand here and congratulate MSF, Joanne and team, for everything they've achieved. Congratulations.

Jeremy Farrar

My Lords, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen: it is an absolute, singular privilege and honour to be here tonight and to say a few words. On a very personal note as well, Joanne and I have worked together over the last few years. To be here to say these last few words at the request of MSF is perhaps the greatest honour to date of my life. Thank you.

MSF stands for things that many of us think about and often talk about, but don't necessarily do. Those of you who missed Joanne's question-and-answer this afternoon missed a real insight into the thinking of an organization and the thinking of an individual. At a time, maybe, as we face the challenges of the 21st century, which will be very different to the challenges that we faced in the past – whether it be the change of environment, the inequality around the world, the movement of people, people leaving their homelands because life is so dreadful there – we will face new challenges, and they will be different. The time comes when you need to look forward and you need to question whether the structures that we have – many of them were put in place in another period of idealism, after the end of the Second World War; the World Health Organization, the World Bank, the United Nations and other organizations – as we face the new challenges of the 21st century, whether they are going to be the sorts of organizations that can take us forward to meet those challenges.

MSF, you have challenged all of us. You have made all of us at various times feel uncomfortable and question why we do things. You must keep doing that. What you have achieved in Ebola, what you have achieved in many areas of conflict over the last years since 1971, is truly remarkable. Never stop fighting. Never stop wanting to change the world. Never stop offering a vision of how the world can be better, because it can be better.

There is a moment in time, there is a tide in the affairs of man, which you have to grasp. We are at one of those moments now. Ebola has shocked. The movement and the migration into Europe over the last few weeks has shocked many people in a way that doesn't happen very often. Those are moments one has to seize and challenge yourself to ask whether you as an individual, whether you as an organization, or whether the world that you live in is the right world to live in. MSF, Joanne, you have offered us a vision for a better world, and for that, we thank you.

Stuart Popham

My Lords, ladies and gentlemen, honoured guests, friends, supporters, members of Chatham House: good evening. What an evening it has been. An evening which I think has evidenced a lot of emotion, mixed emotion. A huge admiration that we may all already have held but now so much more magnified, as to what MSF have done, can do, and how essential that work is. So thank you very much.
A lot has already been said in praise, Joanne, of you and your colleagues, of all your supporters. I would personally like to add to that by congratulating you and the organization on being very worthy winners of the 2015 Prize, and the recognition that I hope you will see that we have sought to find in awarding you that prize. So thank you very much indeed. May I say a special thanks that you were able to join us, and so many of your colleagues also able to join us, here tonight. We really are very grateful that you can do that. I think we are all here as testimony to what you do and what your colleagues have actually achieved.

It falls to me to bring this evening to a close. Principally, that means saying thank you to a lot of people. Thank you in particular to our sponsors, especially to Shell as the lead sponsor, as well as Chevron, AIG, BHP Billiton and DTCC (the Depository Trust and Clearing Corporation). Thank you also to the Princess Royal, appearing here tonight on behalf of the Queen. To Jeremy Farrar, thank you very much, and to Andrew Brown.

Two other thank yous: to everybody here at Plaisterers Hall, particularly welcoming us this year, thank you very much; and to all the Chatham House staff. Apparently, politicians are given these statements that say, do not name anybody, or something like that – there’s a guide for me here, and I’ve been told not to name anybody from Chatham House. But much to her anger, I am going to name one person, and that’s Catherine O’Keeffe, for whom tonight is the last event that she will put together for us. She has been the deputy director of external affairs. She has been with Chatham House for 18 years, and often the person who labours under all those difficulties of organizing events such as this, or the many other events she has to organize. Often, that happens without being thanked. So if you’ll forgive me this slight personal indulgence: Catherine, thank you very much indeed for those 18 years where you have so professionally and meticulously kept us all in order. Thank you very much. You probably never will forgive me for deviating from the script. No names, sorry.

This is a busy time for Chatham House. Our Second Century initiative to raise an endowment to secure our future is well underway. A new set of fellows started last month at our Queen Elizabeth II Academy for Leadership in International Affairs. Investment in digital has seen an increase of over 60 per cent of the hits and activity on the website, which I’m sure all of you are actively doing each day. We’ve continued to expand our research capabilities on, in particular, cross-cutting themes.

It doesn’t go without saying that we at Chatham House depend on and are extremely grateful for your support. Thank you, each and every one of you.

It then leaves me just to wish you a very safe journey home and a good night. Thank you.