



MAILBOX

DOCTOR TO EVERYONE

We arrived at a tent, covered with cardboard and blankets, where the refugees were piling up.

-So doesn't the World Health Organisation have enough of a voice to sway the consciences of national leaders? We are in Europe. Italy is right here. So is Spain.

-We need more doctors, equipment, food... And they know it.

-In the end it all just comes down to conferences, debates, TV specials.

I am amazed at the capacity to forget that so many of us have...

These refugee camps, the consequences of war or earthquake, or hurricanes, can be seen from a long way off.

A group of doctors, sanitation support workers, civil protection staff, Red Cross, army, fire brigade... working ceaselessly, but they are the minority.

We feel more comfortable with the family, in private official consultations, as an essential part of business... The guy who seemed like a social leader at university is now the manager of a Health Centre. The job title has gone to his head. Scarcely a drop of fellow feeling for sufferers. All he cares about is meeting his austerity budget, making sure doctors prescribe less and patients are not referred to specialists.

As doctors we should be there where people need us, face-to-face

with reality, at the heart of the wound, side by side with those suffering pain. Words, speeches, political groupings, meetings. Many of us live only to speak, to write, because that is what strikes a chord with the ceaseless spectacle with which we divert ourselves.

Aid has been requested for Kosovo, Albania, Turkey, Africa, Haiti, South America: more doctors and health care staff; medicine, food, water... Does no one, then, have a true vocation to help those in need? Where are the doctors of the world? Sitting in our surgeries, our consultation rooms in big private clinics and hospitals; in operating theatres and on call, at health centres, with highly qualified nurses and healthcare staff helping us out to the very limit... Others of us read the newspaper, drink coffee and sort out files to organise the whole show, with our fancy computers, ambulances, mobile phones...

In many countries the situation is depressing. A whole army of psychologists would be needed to help, but we are not there either, we prefer our comfortable offices, surgeries, colleges and company contracts by prior appointment.

Something is rotten in the world of medicine. Thousands of Spanish doctors are unemployed, they say. We are businessmen hiding beneath white or green

coats, with our university diplomas framed on the wall... We have studied long and hard to earn money, and that is what matters... But helping those who are suffering, healing wounds, applying all the medical knowledge we have acquired, wherever in the world we are needed, that mass miracle does not come about... We prefer to wait, at home, comfortable, with the family around us.

A medical vocation should instil in us the human values of alleviating the pain-racked figure of those tortured by genocide and terror, illness and malnutrition, in a inhuman world.

Doctors need to be provoked into taking an ethical interest in the problems of human beings. There is no need to be registered, classified, a member of any party, association, trade union or "Mir". All we need is to be doctors to everyone, of whatever colour, whatever race, ideology or flag.

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