

## *Virtual Mentor*

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### **VIEWPOINT**

#### **Doctors Without Borders**

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Horrifying statistics abound. Since December 1998, 800,000 Angolans have been displaced from their homes as a result of a 20-year civil war that killed more than 1 million people. In southern Mexico, more than 200,000 were left homeless by an earthquake and floods. Large segments of East Timor's population of 850,000 were recently forced from their homes to the countryside, and many were brutally slaughtered as a result of civil unrest.

From the human misery and suffering caused by natural and manmade disasters, the more than 2000 volunteer physicians and other medical professionals of [Doctors Without Borders \(Médecins Sans Frontières\)](#) are providing critical assistance in over 80 countries. Established in 1971 by 10 French physicians, the charter of Doctors Without Borders states that:

- Doctors Without Borders offers assistance to populations in distress, to victims of natural or manmade disasters and to victims of armed conflict, without discrimination and irrespective of race, religion, creed, or political affiliation.
- Doctors Without Borders observes strict 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.
- Doctors Without Borders' 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 missions they undertake, and have no right to compensation for themselves or their beneficiaries other than that which Doctors Without Borders is able to afford them.

For their extraordinary humanitarian efforts, Doctors Without Borders was awarded the 1999 Nobel Peace Prize on October 15. The award honors the organization's "pioneering humanitarian work on several continents" and adherence to the "fundamental principle that all disaster victims, whether the disaster is natural or human in origin, have a right to professional assistance, given as quickly and efficiently as possible. Each fearless and self-sacrificing helper shows each victim a human face, stands for respect for that person's dignity, and is a source of hope for peace and reconciliation."

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