Contest to Introduce Dr. James Orbinski

I had intended this to be a response to the query of how the work of Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) and Dr. Orbinski has touched my life. Upon reflection, I thought it more important to comment on how their humanitarianism touches the lives of the immediate recipients as well as greater humanity.

I spent my summer in Israel/Palestine and had occasion to visit refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Here in places like Hebron and Gaza, places where MSF has established programs, I encountered young children who may have been recipients of MSF assistance. Some of the inhumane conditions these children and their friends have suffered from have been alleviated by the work of MSF and Dr. Orbinski. These children live in places lacking adequate sanitation infrastructure and health services, but still they laugh and cry and play and mug for pictures. These children cannot relocate to escape the scourge of conflict, but because of MSF assistance they do not suffer the devastating effects of malnutrition or psychological separation from parents. In the squalid conditions of refugee camps, deprived of their freedom of movement by occupying forces, these children can still believe in and aspire to a better life.

These children, running, jumping, doing handstands, are also symbols. They represent the hope and promise of humanity’s future. They represent the better world that humanity should expect and demand. A better world in which children can be children; in which human rights are respected; and in which innocents are freed from the ravages of war. This is the better world that MSF and Dr. Orbinski are helping humanity to realize.

Ultimately the children of the West Bank and Gaza, like the children of Chechnya, Rwanda and Afghanistan, are the promise of a world, to quote Dr. Orbinski’s Nobel Prize acceptance speech, in which every person is recognized in his or her humanity.