

Remarks by Deputy Chief of Mission Sandra Clark
Opening Ceremony for OBANGAME/SAHARAN EXPRESS 16
Dakar Naval Base – Dakar
Thursday, March 17, 2016

(As prepared)

CEMARINE
CEMAIR
C6F
Commandant, CV Coast Guard
Officers and guests

Let me begin by thanking the Government of Senegal for agreeing to host the Opening Ceremony for OBANGAME and SAHARAN EXPRESS 2016. Senegal has a long history of participating in and hosting SAHARAN EXPRESS – this will be the first year that these two prominent Gulf of Guinea Naval Exercises are linked. I would also like to thank U.S. Naval Forces Africa and U.S. AFRICOM for sponsoring the exercise; the skills that will be honed here will substantially enhance the future security of the West African maritime domain. Thank you also to the 30 partner nations either participating in or observing OBANGAME and SAHARAN EXPRESS this year. You are the reason that this exercise exists.

The issues surrounding the maritime domain affect all of us and require a cooperative solution. Those engaged in illegal fishing, pollution, and trafficking in drugs, arms and people, routinely move across national maritime borders. Pirates prey upon international merchants. To ensure that safe zones do not exist for criminals, countries must regularly exchange information about known or suspected offenders with their neighbors. Neighbors must establish protocols by which law enforcement agencies can ensure criminals are brought to justice, regardless of which side of a maritime border they operate. It is exercises like this one that allow us to test the strength of our cooperation and to expose those zones, whether physical, legal, or diplomatic, that provide sanctuaries for criminal activities.

We all have a responsibility to improve maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. Our economic interests are often the targets of the pirates. We have a stake in the security of this region and a responsibility to help and we can do that through the Global Network of Navies. No one nation can rid the world of those that threaten maritime security, but together, we can. This exercise will help to strengthen our global network, so we can exchange naval tactics, protocols of communication, and even language, and like good sailors, repair any holes in our nets.

In the end, we do these exercises because there is a real national benefit to working together to achieve maritime security.

I wish you all a safe and productive exercise. Thank you.