



AMBASSADOR LEWIS A. LUKENS
SAHARAN EXPRESS CLOSING (“HOTWASH”)
REMARKS
APRIL 30, 2012
NOVOTEL HOTEL

Contra Admiral Sane, Chief of Naval Staff;
Rear Admiral KJ Norton, Future Plans/Policy division at NAVAF (US Naval Forces Africa)

I'm honored to speak to you today at the close of the second Saharan Express exercise, Saharan Express 2012. This exercise is a central part of our maritime security efforts in West Africa.

This week, Cape Verde, France, the Gambia, Liberia, Mauritania, Morocco, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Spain, the United Kingdom, and of course, the U.S., came together to work toward a common goal – to find collaborative ways to improve maritime security in West Africa's coastal waters.

During this past week, participating navies enacted scenarios they might encounter when patrolling maritime areas. Real-time simulations gave sailors a chance to practice boarding suspect vehicles; seek out illegal fishing activities; and search for and seize illicit cargo. As part of this exercise, participating countries worked together to ensure that we can prevent criminals from exploiting international boundaries to conduct illicit activity. The techniques and procedures you practiced this week can be used as part of actual future maritime operations.

As I mentioned, all our efforts are focused on increasing maritime safety and security in West Africa. By making our seas more secure, we can reduce and control problems such as trafficking in persons, narcotics, and illegal material; not to mention help put a stop to crimes such as illegal fishing and piracy.

Each of you has played a key role in this exercise. You have shown your deep commitment to stability and maritime security in West Africa. You have increased the capability of your navy to contribute to safety and security in your waters.

Our efforts have become even more important as we watch neighboring states like Mali and Guinea-Bissau confront major challenges to their democracies and security structures. Our hosts for this exercise, the Senegalese, demonstrate to the world that stable West African democracies are essential to regional security.

I hope that the 2012 Saharan Express exercise has helped develop the standardized procedures that will allow everyone to work together more effectively to combat illicit activity in the maritime domain. Through this strong regional partnership – working together to fight the enemies of maritime safety and security – we are forming a united front. The United States is strongly committed to this goal and sincerely thanks all the participating countries for dedicating resources and personnel in order for this exercise to be a success.

Congratulations on a successful exercise!