



**Remarks**  
**Ambassador Lewis Lukens**  
**Saharan Express 2013 Post-Exercise Closing Ceremony**  
**Hotel Pullman Taranga**  
**Thursday, March 14, 2013**

*(As prepared)*

I'm honored to speak to you today at the close of the third Saharan Express exercise, Saharan Express 2013.

I last spoke to you a year ago today. Who would have thought that in the intervening time, we would have conflicts in the region, such as in Mali, one of the most enduring democracies in West Africa? Other neighbors, such as Guinea and Guinea-Bissau, have also experienced their own share of civil unrest, and general difficulties.

This week, all of you -- representing Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, France, the Gambia, Holland, Liberia, Mauritania, Morocco, Portugal, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the U.S. -- came together to learn how to communicate and coordinate as a team, all towards one common goal. I hope that you have seen over the past week how important it is for you to work together, to stay in touch as much as you need to, to improve maritime security in the waters off West Africa. When one of your countries wins by preventing illegal activity in these waters, you all win. Maritime security is of prime importance to the region's security overall.

Now, I would like to talk about what we mean by "maritime security," and why is it so important? Simply put, it means the capacity to extend law and order beyond the land and into the waters that supply so many resources and so many livelihoods in the region. But it is important to note that it is more than an abstract concept. Maritime security brings real and tangible benefits to all the countries participating in Saharan Express this week.

For our West African partners, maritime security means that fishermen can work in greater safety, kept safe from criminals and piracy, and secure in the knowledge that the navies and coast guards of the region are better prepared to conduct search and rescue operations. It means that the flow of drugs and illegal trafficking faces yet another obstacle. And it also means that the countries of West Africa are able to benefit from the ocean resources that are rightfully theirs as they improve their capacity to police their own waters and stop illegal fishing.

What you do on a daily basis to contribute to this achievement is important for you, the leaders of your countries, and your fellow citizens -- including your children and grandchildren. This marks the third time that this exercise has been conducted, and I'm happy to say that it has become a cornerstone in our efforts to achieve this goal. Thank you for doing your best every day, on the job and here at this training, to improve regional security here in West Africa.

But the benefits of maritime security extend far beyond the region. To the United States and our European partners, it means fewer drugs making their way north and west. It means greater stability in a region that is increasingly interconnected socially, politically, and economically with Europe and the United States. And of course, it means the problems we find ourselves dealing with today in Guinea-Bissau and Mali are less likely to spread.

Now, important though it is, maritime security is not the only goal of Saharan Express. We have also been working this past week – indeed, these past three years – towards improving the cooperation, coordination, and interoperability of all participating nations.

And again, I must emphasize that these are not just empty words, for these concepts also bring with them real benefits. Interoperability means developing common operating procedures, so that a Portuguese aircraft may one day be able to help find a lost Cape Verdean fisherman. Coordination means that the Maritime Operations Centers of the region can better pass information and synchronize their operations, so that when an illegal fisherman flees Gambian waters, he can be intercepted by the Senegalese and brought to justice.

And finally, cooperation. Cooperation is so very important to you, the participants in Saharan Express. Cooperation refers to the spirit of togetherness that Saharan Express helps to foster. The professional relationships and the friendships that have developed during this year's Saharan Express and the previous years'. It is through these personal relationships that we learn how much we all have in common, and the interest we all share in safer, more secure oceans.

In closing, I would like to extend my thanks to all the participants who have made this exercise possible this year. First of all, to our hosts, the Senegalese Navy. It is not an exaggeration to say that this simply would not have happened without your hospitality, your hard work, and most of all your tremendous professionalism. Next I must mention all the planners and support personnel, coming from each and every participating nation, who have made this exercise a success this year. For them, Saharan Express is not a week-long event, but a year-long schedule of planning conferences and coordination.

And finally, to the sailors, marines, pilots, and other military personnel who took part in Saharan Express 2013. You have been challenged over the past week and you have succeeded. You have represented your countries and your services well. And you have, I hope, had the opportunity to forge friendships with your counterparts in West Africa, Europe, and the United States. Friendships that will help foster the true spirit of international security cooperation. I extend my thanks to all of you. But more importantly, the people of your countries thank you. Your efforts here this week are helping to bring us all closer to the goal of an ocean that is safer, more secure, and the source of prosperity that the people of this region deserve.

Congratulations on a successful exercise!