

**Remarks**  
**Sandra Clark, Chargé d'affaires, a.i.**  
**Saharan Express -- Closing Ceremony**  
**Dakar**  
**Friday, March 14, 2014**

*(As prepared)*

It is a pleasure to join you here today. This is the fourth edition of the Saharan Express series of exercises. Twelve different countries – the largest number so far – are joining together to improve maritime security in West Africa. Thank you to all the military members from Cabo-Verde, France, Great-Britain, Liberia, Mauritania, Morocco, Netherlands, Portugal, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Spain, and the U.S.A. who came to take part in this important exercise. We are so glad that even more representatives of various countries have joined Saharan Express 2014. This is an opportunity to learn new ways of operating, and benefit from a greater diversity of experience. We all grow stronger from your presence.

Saharan Express is important because it is aimed at maritime security capacity building. This will help extend law and order into the waters that supply so many resources in all our countries. In addition, many people make their living on the seas. Improved maritime security means that the ocean will no longer be a refuge to those who would commit illegal acts. Those who are working on the open seas will feel more secure that help will arrive when they are in distress.

Maritime security is an investment in the future. This investment will pay dividends back to the citizens whose taxes are funding participation in this exercise. We can find an example right here in Senegal. According to a recent study -- funded in part by the United States Agency for International Development -- the value of fish caught illegally in the Senegalese Exclusive Economic Zone is approximately 145 billion CFA. That is 145 billion CFA per year that is not subject to taxation. That is 145 billion CFA less per year flowing into the pocketbooks of Senegalese fishermen.

However, the long-term and environmental costs of illegal and unregulated fishing are even greater than the short-term economic costs. One-hundred forty-five billion CFA equates to between 300,000 to 450,000 tons of fish per year. This means that a huge amount of fish are being caught illegally without any consideration of the long-term health and sustainability of Senegalese fisheries. Senegalese fishermen -- and the Senegalese people -- are robbed twice. Once, when a catch is taken illegally. And looking forward, when overfishing leads to dwindling stocks.

Saharan Express also aims to improve enforcement of fisheries regulations in West Africa. These rules have existed for some time. As you know, however, a rule is only respected if there is the ability to enforce it. Over the past week, the participants in this exercise have improved their ability to monitor and inspect suspicious vessels. As West African navies and Coast Guards improve their abilities, I am confident that they will begin to see the benefits of their maritime security training. I am confident that money from fisheries will once again flow into -- rather than out of -- the region.

Saharan Express is about more than fishing and fisheries protection. We all benefit when responsible states are better able to control their land and water territories. The waters of the West African nations taking part in Saharan Express have remained largely free of criminality and piracy at sea. However, it is only through constant attention that we can keep them that way.

And just as the skills exercised in Saharan Express can help prevent piracy, they are also vital in the fight against drug trafficking. We have seen an increase in the use of West Africa as a transshipment point for drugs. By closing the door to this menace, better maritime security can protect people both within the region and abroad from its effects.

Saharan Express also develops the ability to conduct search and rescue operations. This training will also make it possible for you to respond professionally to those in distress. This is an important ability and will only become more so as ever greater numbers of goods pass into, out of, or through West African waters. Those who sail upon or fly over the sea will appreciate your lifesaving training.

This training will not only benefit West Africa and West Africans. This training will have a direct impact on security in Europe, North America, and the rest of this evermore interconnected world. Your training will mean that fewer drugs will reach European and American streets. Fewer illegal migrants will find their way to foreign shores. As economic growth improves, we will all see the benefit of a wealthier world with more trading partners. The benefits of your training will be felt an ocean away.

In closing, I would like to speak directly to the all the military members -- as well as their compatriots in civilian and law enforcement agencies -- that have planned and executed this year's Saharan Express. The past week of exercises and training have been challenging; but, I also hope, valuable. You should feel proud of your accomplishments. Once again, you have proven that you are professionals. And you have also shown that you are able representatives of your services and your countries. More importantly, though, the work you have put in over the past week will help to advance the goal of better maritime security in all our countries. It will improve your ability to act in your countries' interests. Most of all, it will help to improve the safety and prosperity of your fellow citizens.

This year, the number of participating countries has increased. Officers from each country in the region have co-led every aspect of the planning, from communications to logistics. Special thanks to those of you who have worked to plan this exercise for the past year. Congratulations to all of you.

Here's to another successful Saharan Express!