



THE IMPORTANCE OF GLOBAL HEALTH DIPLOMACY

Remarks by Ellen P. Embry, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Health Protection and Readiness, at the HHS Meeting on Global Health Diplomacy, Miami, FL, December 12, 2008.

Thank you for that kind introduction, and good morning to all of you. When I left Washington this morning, it was about 30 degrees, so it's wonderful to be here in sunny Miami.

I'd also like to thank Dr. Bart Chernow of the University of Miami's Miller School of Medicine for hosting this event. We appreciate the great work your president, Donna Shalala, has done with Senaor Dole, for wounded warriors.

Assistant Secretary Garcia, Ambassador Trivelli, Dr. Timboe, Commodore Ponds, Assistant Secretary Carbonell, distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Miami and Dade County leaders and friends, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for coming.

Importance of Global Health Diplomacy

As Admiral Garcia has noted, global health diplomacy is not just a slogan but an important part of U.S. national security policy – and has been, actually, for a long time.

As far back as 1961, President John F. Kennedy proposed what was then a bold new plan called “Alliance for Progress” to help our neighbors to the South meet the basic needs of their people.

More recently, President Bush's “Initiative for the Western Hemisphere” laid out a course to send military medical teams to countries in Central and South America, and the Caribbean. And since that time, military medical professionals have provided medical, dental, and surgical care to tens of thousands of patients in need.

So, Operation Continuing Promise is just that – a continuation of our commitment to help our neighbors in the Western Hemisphere, and other nations around the world, advance not just liberty, democracy, and prosperity, but also the health and well-being of its people.

As President Bush put it, “Today, the most important ties between North and South America are not government to government, but people to people.

An Interagency Effort

In a few minutes, SOUTHCOM Deputy Commander, Admiral , and Commodore Ponds will detail the many services the USS Kearsarge was able to provide on its three-month, six-nation mission to Central and South America.

And you will hear, as well, from our fellow government and non-government partners about their accomplishments in the region – Which only emphasizes the fact that while the Department of Defense can bring amazing assets to bear in the effort to build health capacity around the world, it is not a mission we can achieve on our own. We need the help and support of everyone in this room.

And so, I thank our partners in this effort for all they have done, and all they will continue to do in the future – The Department of Health and Human Services, and its extraordinary Public Health Service; our non-governmental partners, Project Hope and Operation Smile, whose many doctors, nurses, surgeons, and others bring not just help but hope to those in need; medical personnel from our partner nations – Canada, the Netherlands, Brazil, and Brazil; and of course, the dedicated men and women of the USS Kearsarge, and all the other joint military and international military medical professionals, whose skill and compassion have made this incredible Operation possible.

Making a Difference

Together, we are making a real difference in the lives of people, and advancing the cause of security and stability as well. Indeed, as Secretary Gates likes to stress, improving health and health care independence throughout the global community is just as critical to enhancing sustainability and preventing conflict as our other missions across the globe.

Without a doubt, ships like the USS Kearsarge and the USS Boxer are tangible symbols of America's significant military might. But with missions like Operation Continuing Promise they are much more: They are the tangible symbol, as President Bush has said, "of the great compassion of the American people and our desire to help those [in need]"

So, I thank you for all you have done to advance these goals. And we look forward to continuing to work with you in the future. ■