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2015-08-18 | Latin America [\(/en_GB/keywords/topic/latin_america\)](#) | Continuing Promise Provides Medical, Dental Care to Tens of Thousands in Latin America, Caribbean



Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Patrick Essel (R), assigned to the Naval Medical Center Portsmouth, Va., and a volunteer with the non-governmental organization (NGO) Latter-day Saints Charities (LDSC), takes a patient's vital signs aboard the Military Sealift Command hospital ship USNS Comfort (T-AH 20) during Continuing Promise 2015. [Photo: U.S. Navy / Maddelin Angebrand]

Holger Alava

U.S. Navy physicians have provided free medical and dental treatment, including surgeries, to tens of thousands of people in remote areas of Latin America and the Caribbean thanks to the Continuing Promise 2015 (CP-15) humanitarian mission, sponsored by the United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM).

CP is a U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command/US 4th Fleet-conducted deployment to execute civil-military operations that include humanitarian-civil assistance, subject matter expert exchanges, medical, dental, veterinary, and engineering support to partner nations.

The Military Sealift Command hospital ship USNS Comfort (T-AH 20) left the Naval base in Virginia on April 1, and arrived in Belize, its first port stop, on April 9. The

physicians and crew members on the vessel, where the surgeries are undertaken, are scheduled to complete the operation in September.

By then, the doctors and dentists on the ship will have treated about 104,000 patients in 11 countries – Belize, Colombia, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, and Panama.

It's the third time – and the first since 2009 – the USNS Comfort has visited the Dominican Republic on a humanitarian mission.

A cooperative effort

During the ninth of its 11 visits under CP-15, the Comfort is anchored on the coast of the Dominican Republic capital of Santo Domingo since August 14. Doctors and dentists will offer free medical check-ups and treatment to Dominican patients as the visit was coordinated by the country's Ministry of Defense in cooperation with the U.S. Navy.

For 10 days, U.S. Military and civilian personnel will work side by side with their Dominican counterparts to provide a wide array of medical services in ophthalmology, pediatrics, cardiology, and dermatology, as well as dental and veterinary treatment, and engineering projects.

“Unquestionably this is an important program for the Dominican Republic – more than 12,000 people will receive free medical care in different specialties, mainly child patients,” said Daniel Pou, an associate analyst and researcher at the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO) in the Dominican Republic. “The project demonstrates closeness and interest by the United States with Caribbean and Central American nations, as well as its will to strengthen friendly ties with Latin American partner nations.”

“For the first time, Dominican authorities have been deployed widely to an operation of this nature to inform the civil society of the benefits of this humanitarian aid,” Pou added. “Dominican doctors who participate in the civil-military program have great experience and practice in working together in such missions. On this occasion, the Dominican Military personnel will handle the operational and coordination side of the program.”

The hospitals selected in coordination with the Ministry of Health to provide these medical treatments are in Parque del Este (at the handball courts) and the Hermandad de los Pensionados sector.

Improving infrastructure

USNS Comfort provides more than medical and dental care to Dominicans.

The U.S. Navy Corps of Engineers, in cooperation with the Dominican Republic Ministry of Education, is also undertaking two projects to construct and renovate two schools - Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Educational Center and the National Resource Center, National Directorate for Special Education.

Before its arrival in the Dominican Republic, the Comfort visited the Caribbean island nation of Dominica from July 28-August 6, when the ship's personnel worked with local Military service members and civilian medical professionals from Brazil, the Bahamas, Canada, Chile, Germany, El Salvador, Panama and Peru, just as it did in previous stops.

Non-governmental organizations, including Project HOPE, Latter-day Saints Charities, the University of California-San Diego Pre-Dental Society, and World Vets, also participated in the mission.

Such humanitarian missions are an important component of the ongoing cooperation among the Dominican Republic, other Latin American and Caribbean countries, and the United States in the fight against transnational organized crime and other security challenges.

“Building partnerships with each country is critical to the overall success of the mission,” said Captain Sam Hancock, CP-15’s mission commander. “We look forward to the opportunity to foster goodwill and build partner capacity and capability through the dozens of collaborations with our Dominican counterparts.”

Previously, the Comfort stopped at the Port of Buenaventura, Colombia, from July 8-18, where on the first day of operations medical and dental personnel provided treatment to more than 700 patients. By the conclusion of the Comfort’s first visit to Colombia, the 1,000 Military physicians on board had treated approximately 10,000 patients from Buenaventura and its neighboring municipalities. The patients received treatment from ophthalmologists, gynecologists, general surgeons, optometrists, veterinarians, general practitioners, dentists, radiologists, cosmetic surgeons, and veterinarians.

After its initial port stop in Belize from April 9-19, the Comfort visited Jamaica and Nicaragua in early to mid-May, Panama from late May to June, and El Salvador later on that month.

Other SOUTHCOM cooperation programs in the region

SOUTHCOM maintains various security operations with regional partner nations that involve military training, counter drug missions, and the exchange of technology and knowledge, as countries work together to confront mutual security challenges in the region, such as transnational organized crime.

It sponsors several joint training exercises in the region, including UNITAS; Beyond the Horizon, Allied Humanitarian Forces (FAHUM); Fused Response; New Horizons; Panamax; Tradewinds; Hemispheric Solidarity; and Hemispheric Defense.

SOUTHCOM also sponsors the annual Fuerzas Comando event, a military skills competition, including marksmanship and traversing obstacle courses, between special operations Troops from regional partner nations. In July, Colombia won the event, which is conducted by U.S. Special Operations Command South (SOCSOUTH), for the third year in a row.

“Cooperation between the United States and the countries of the region will intensify through training exercises and cooperation, both in quantity and in terms of time extension,” Pou said.

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01)

Chilean Armed Forces Prepare to Help Civilians During Natural Disasters (/en_GB/articles/rmisa/features/2015/08/03/feature-01)

2015-08-03

Chile's Armed Forces are training to assist civilians during natural disasters, such as earthquakes and hurricanes. ([http://dialogo-](http://dialogo-americas.com/en_GB/articles/rmisa/features/2015/08/03/feature-01)

[americas.com/en_GB/articles/rmisa/features/2015/08/03/feature-01](http://dialogo-americas.com/en_GB/articles/rmisa/features/2015/08/03/feature-01))



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02)

Armed Forces of Argentina and Chile Bolster Ties at Bilateral Meeting (/en_GB/articles/rmisa/features/2015/07/13/feature-02)

2015-07-13

A working meeting between military representatives of Argentina and Chile strengthened the cooperative relationship between the two countries. ([http://dialogo-](http://dialogo-americas.com/en_GB/articles/rmisa/features/2015/07/13/feature-02)

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[01\)](#)

Training Voyage by Chilean Navy Training Vessel Esmeralda Bolsters Cooperation with Partner Nations

[\(/en_GB/articles/rmisa/features/2015/07/07/feature-01\)](#)

2015-07-07

The Chilean Navy training vessel Esmeralda recently launched a training tour that will visit 11 ports in nine countries. Naval authorities are training Ensigns and Cadets on board the ship. The mission bolsters cooperation with partner nations. (http://dialogo-americas.com/en_GB/articles/rmisa/features/2015/07/07/feature-01)
