

News Release



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NATO Provides Medical Aid to Somali Villagers

Last weekend, the villagers of Xabo and Bandar Murcayo were given access to medical facilities provided by NATO's counter piracy flagship, HNLMS Rotterdam. The flagship was patrolling off the north east Somali coast and took the opportunity to move nearer into the shore so that villagers could make their way out to landing craft carrying on board a complete medical team and improvised facilities.

The Staff Medical Officer of the NATO task force, Commander Klaas Visser, said "Early in September we provided basic medical health care for both villages. What strikes me was that compared to our last visit, this time the patients mainly consisting of women and small children without their menfolk accompanying them. This may be indicative of greater trust and understanding by the villagers. On this occasion over 150 villagers received basic medical health care." stated Visser.

While NATO's principal remit is defeating and deterring piracy. Its warships possess a number of capabilities that allow it the flexibility to provide additional help while not stepping outside of their mandate. Ships like the HNLMS ROTTERDAM, the command ship of OP OCEAN SHIELD are particularly versatile. As Cdre Ben Bekkering, Commander of the task force says, "they are the equivalent of a floating swiss army knife. And the capabilities of this ship coupled with sailors who possess an array of skills mean that we can contribute a great deal more."

Cdre Bekkering continued, "By using our landing craft in such an imaginative way as a floating health clinic we are able to provide basic medical support just off shore. We identified these villages because they are accessible from the sea and they have hitherto had no medical care whatsoever. Speaking with the village elders, they are clear that the security situation needs to change to allow aid to come in. In the mean time, we aim to do what we can, within our means, capabilities and of course, our mandate."

Vice Admiral Christian Canova, Deputy Commander of MC Northwood stated, "our success against piracy at sea is helping to prepare the ground ashore for stability because it encourages all in the community to realise there must be an alternative lifestyle and other licit means to promote prosperity. Into this

developing situation, other organisations that are better tailored and mandated than NATO to undertake humanitarian tasks ashore such as spreading of good governance, law and order and development programmes can now begin to pursue their work while we continue to maintain our guard at sea because piracy has not been eradicated in Somalia.”

NATO’s task force, in co-ordination with EU NAVFOR and CMF, will continue to operate along the coast, to reassure the people, deter the pirates and when necessary, disrupt the pirate groups before they can form danger for the shipping. Engaging with local and regional seafarers, meeting village elders and conducting medical visits in landing craft just offshore are instruments used to expand the reach and effects of the counter piracy effort and limit pirate action groups in their ability to deploy.

Background Information:

NATO has contributed to the international counter piracy effort off the Horn of Africa since December 2008. The mission has expanded from escorting UN and World Food Programme Shipping under Operation Allied Provider and protecting merchant traffic in the Gulf of Aden under Operation Allied Protector. In addition to these activities and as part of the latest mission, Operation Ocean Shield, NATO is working with other international bodies to help develop capacity of countries in the region to tackle piracy on their own.

NATO Allies agreed on 19 March 2012 to extend Operation Ocean Shield for a further two years until the end of 2014.

NATO Forces currently in Operation Ocean Shield:
HNLMS Rotterdam (flagship) – The Netherlands
USS Halyburton (United States of America)
HDMS Iver Huitfeldt (Denmark)

Media Inquiries only to:

Public Affairs Officer
+44 (0)1923 956763

Email: pio@manw.nato.int

Facebook: [operationoceanshield](https://www.facebook.com/operationoceanshield)

Twitter: [@oceanshield](https://twitter.com/oceanshield)