

Comfort Returning to Norfolk After Completing Mission in South and Central America

NORFOLK, Va. – The U.S. Navy hospital ship USNS Comfort is scheduled to return to Naval Station Norfolk Dec. 18, after completing a deployment to South and Central America, Military Sealift Command announced in a Dec. 14 release.

Returning to Norfolk signifies the conclusion of Comfort's 11-week medical support mission to the region as part of U.S. Southern Command's Operation Enduring Promise initiative.

Comfort's embarked medical team worked with health and government partners in Ecuador, Peru, Colombia and Honduras, providing care both aboard the ship and at land-based medical sites, helping to relieve pressure on national medical systems caused partially by an increase in cross-border migrants. The deployment reflected the United States' enduring promise of friendship, partnership and solidarity with the Americas.

The ship's crew included more than 465 U.S. and partner nation military doctors, nurses and corpsmen. In addition, about 90 medical and dental professional volunteers from nongovernmental organizations were aboard to support the medical assistance mission. The mission was supported by a team of civil service mariners who oversaw the ship's operation and navigation. During the mission, Comfort visited Esmeraldas, Ecuador, Paita, Peru, Turbo, Colombia, Riohacha, Colombia, and Trujillo, Honduras.

Health services provided during Comfort's deployment included general surgery, ophthalmologic surgery, dermatology, medical evaluation and treatment, preventive medicine, dental screenings and treatment, optometry screenings, eyewear distribution, and general public health. Medical capabilities

aboard the hospital ship include surgical and post-surgical rooms, a CAT-scan unit, four X-ray machines, a dental suite, an optometry lab, a physical therapy area, two oxygen-producing plants and a 5,000-unit blood bank.

During the port visits, Comfort's medical team treated over 26,000 patients and conducted approximately 600 surgeries to include cataracts, hernias, cleft palates and more. Additionally, Comfort hosted approximately 1,000 distinguished visitors and guests during 53 distinguished visitor and media days to include the president of Honduras and prime minister of Peru.

Comfort's Enduring Promise mission demonstrated U.S. commitment to the Americas and is part of a continuum of support provided by U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM). SOUTHCOM-sponsored civic assistance and humanitarian missions were conducted in close cooperation with partner nations in the region as well as with U.S. interagency partners at the U.S. Department of State and USAID. Similar missions include Continuing Promise, New Horizons, Beyond the Horizon, medical readiness training exercises and the Medical Civil Action Program.

This mission marked the sixth time the hospital ship has provided medical assistance in the region. Since first deploying to the region on a similar mission more than a decade ago, the hospital ship has visited 18 nations in the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. During those missions, military medical professionals worked with host nation and civilian

partners to provide medical treatment to nearly 390,000 people, including more than 6,000 surgeries.