



JOINT PRESS RELEASE

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ITALIAN HUMANITARIAN MISSION: NEW HORIZONS FOR THE PROJECT “BRINGING BACK LIGHT” - A NEW MISSION IN MALI TAKES OFF.

The Italian humanitarian mission “Bringing back Light 2009” will take place in the Republic of Mali from November 24th to December 10th 2009 and will treat the people of the Sahel desert region for eye diseases. In addition, starting this year, general surgery operations will also be performed and there will be an exchange of know-how on new surgical techniques between Italian and Mali doctors and medical personnel.

The mission “Bringing back Light” is run in coordination and collaboration with the NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation) “Fatebenefratelli Association for Distant Sick People” (AFMAL) – the originator of the initiative, the Italian Air Force, Alenia Aeronautica (a Finmeccanica company), the Italian Army, the Foreign Ministry, the Advanced Health Institute, volunteers and other Italian private firms. The mission involves 60 people, including doctors, paramedics, pilots and personnel providing logistical support.

*“Today the Armed Forces, thanks to their capabilities and professionalism, are in constant dialogue with social and voluntary bodies in order to provide help where it is needed, when it is needed,” said **Chief General Inspector Ottavio Sarlo, Head of the Health Department of the Italian Air Force.** He added “The mission “Bringing back Light” is a clear example of how our country is able to bring together its resources to “give back life” to the third world populations in a way that it is both concrete and hands-on”.*

The mission incorporates many new initiatives, in particular donations of medical equipment for endoscopic digestive surgery and for laboratory analysis (testing) as well as offering specific courses for local doctors. Training will be a cornerstone of the mission. During the two weeks in Mali, a seminar will be arranged for doctors and local paramedics on the emergency cardio-pulmonary intensive care techniques, and on the use of new operating techniques in abdominal and laparoscopic surgery. Specialist military doctors, attending the Aeronautical Improvement Course in Aeronautical and Space Medicine, will undertake, alongside Mali doctors, a course on the typical pathologies of tropical and highly deprived areas.

The subject of the treatment of infectious diseases is very important and *“the Directorate General for Development and Cooperation, in close collaboration with the Department of Infectious Diseases of the Advanced Health Institute, is engaged in building an eye clinic at the hospital in Gaò. This includes the construction of an ophthalmology department, the installation of an eye surgery facility and testing laboratory where Italian and Mali doctors will work together in the treatment and study of eye pathologies”*, said **Dr. Elisabetta Belloni, Chief of the Directorate General for Development Cooperation of the Foreign Ministry.**

The medical, paramedical, civil and military staff will leave on November 24th from the Pratica di Mare airport (Rome) and will operate at the hospital in Gaò, a small town on the Niger river near Nigeria. Equipment, sanitary materials and personnel will arrive in Africa on a C-130J from Pisa's 46th Air Wing and on Alenia Aeronautica's new tactical transport aircraft, the C-27J.

“It is with great pleasure that again this year Alenia Aeronautica is able to offer its own technology and personnel in support of an initiative, which is not only an excellent example of solidarity and collaboration, but also one that reflexes the fundamental values at the core of our business”, comments **Alenia Aeronautica's CEO, Giovanni Bertolone.**

The eye specialists come from the following hospitals: Fatebenefratelli San Pietro of Rome, Isola Tiberina and San Giovanni di Dio of Seville (Spain), San Camillo of Rome and from the medical personnel of the Italian Air Force. Together they will undertake ophthalmology operations, such as the treatment for cataract, that, in various forms, affect about 80 percent of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa. Since 2003, AFMAL has been fulfilling this activity in Mali and, since 2004, with the help of the Italian Air Force has accomplished ten missions with over 19,000 visits and 3,600 surgical cataract operations.

“The project “Bringing back Light” aims to liberate children who often from a young age are required to act as guides for blind people, depriving them of their childhood, education, playtime and prospects. At the same time we enable the adults to live autonomously, giving them back their sight with this operations” – said **Fra Gerardo D'Auria, AFMAL's National Vice President.**

Also participating are surgeons and anaesthesiologists from both the Air Force and Army, the Advanced Health Institute, the “Nuova Itor” clinic of Rome, the University “La Sapienza” and “Tor Vergata”, “Fatebenefratelli” and Vanderbilt University in Tennessee (USA).