

COMBINED JOINT TASK FORCE - HORN OF AFRICA

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US Business Execs Become Familiar with CJTF-HOA Mission

Story by Capt. Jonathan Friedman, CJTF-HOA Public Affairs

NAIROBI, Kenya -- Eight members of the Business Executives for National Security embarked on a journey of Eastern Africa Oct. 8 to gain a better understanding of the region and to assess the issues facing these countries.

The group -- hosted by Combined-Joint Task Force Horn of Africa Commander Rear Adm. Richard Hunt -- consist of successful business executives from the United States. The group began their 6-day journey by speaking with US military and embassy officials about the humanitarian efforts being made in the region

"We hope to stimulate innovative thinking across all areas of our efforts in the CJTF-HOA area," said Navy Capt. Kevin Hutcheson, deputy foreign policy advisor and BENS trip coordinator. "The extensive business experience of the BENS group will help us to identify barriers to regional security cooperation and prosperity. By helping us to identify key policy, institutional and capacity gaps, the BENS delegation can more clearly help us to identify the path to regional security, stability and prosperity."

After the initial briefings, the group departed for Lamu, Kenya, for a first-hand look at the humanitarian efforts being made there.

BENS member Peter Thoren, executive vice president of Access Industries, Inc., noted that this trip is about gaining a broader political, economic and military perspective on issues facing and driving US policy in the region.

"Despite the many challenges that Eastern Africa faces, there is great opportunity for economic and political development, if a focused approach is pursued," said Mr. Thoren. "What BENS members hope to do is to understand the key issues facing American policymakers and determine if there are ways that we can help in their development from our own experiences."

The group visited an underdeveloped section of Nairobi called Kibera, in which the members not only met with medical professionals battling on the frontlines with the overwhelming problem of HIV and Tuberculosis, but had an opportunity to interact with school children playing on a makeshift soccer field.

BENS member Mary McInnis Boies, law partner with Boies & McInnis LLP, noted that the

severe poverty in Kibera silenced even the most outspoken in the group. "Our van turned off from a main road and 5 blocks later we were in another world. There were shanty-like stalls on either side of the road, selling old fruit, used clothing, and rudimentary (and worn) consumer goods. There was an open stream of water or sewer in the middle of the road. Although I have never seen such poverty, the people were friendly and the children waved at us," said Ms. Boies.

She noted how impressed the group was with the medical staff helping those in the area through the President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief. "The doctors and staff of the PEPFAR clinic are angels among us. They are highly educated and could work wherever they choose. They have dedicated themselves to helping those who are most in need," she said.

While the group is scheduled to tour and meet officials in Kenya, Djibouti, Yemen and Ethiopia during the visit, most have already mentioned that they are greatly moved individually from the experience.

"Personally, I hope to gain a broader appreciation and understanding of this area of the world, and to have a greater awareness of both the challenges and opportunities facing the citizens of these nations and the significant diplomatic, development and military efforts being made by our government in the region," said Mr Thoren.

LAMU, Kenya -- Lamu County Council Chairman CLLR. Omar Famau speaks with the Business Executives for National Security delegates during an open discussion about the issues facing the people of Lamu, while Rear Adm. Richard Hunt, Combined-Joint Task Force Horn of Africa commander, looks on. The BENS delegates are touring Eastern Africa to gain a better understanding of the region and to assess the issues facing these countries.

(U.S. Navy Photo by MCC Philip A. Fortnam)



NAIROBI, Kenya -- Members of the Business Executives for National Security toured the underdeveloped section of Nairobi called Kibera, led by (ret) Gen. Charles Boyd, BENS president and CEO. The BENS delegates are touring Eastern Africa to gain a better understanding of the region and to assess the issues facing these countries.
(U.S. Navy Photo by MCC Philip A. Fortnam)

