

Navy Surgeon General Receives Djibouti's Highest Honor

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DJIBOUTI, Djibouti (NNS) -- The U.S. Navy surgeon general was presented with the Medal of the Commander of the National Order by Djibouti's prime minister in Djibouti Nov. 14.

After a meeting with Djibouti President Ismail Omar Guelleh, Navy Surgeon General Vice Adm. Adam M. Robinson Jr. was awarded Djibouti's highest award by Djibouti Prime Minister Dileita Mohamed Dileita for the U.S. Navy's efforts in working with the African nation to improve its public health system.

The medal, the highest award that can be bestowed by the African country, was presented to Robinson due to the work by U.S. Navy Medical Research Unit (NAMRU) 3 to enhance infectious disease surveillance within Djibouti. During the past decade, the Navy unit developed surveillance systems that are designed to focus on specific syndromes of interest while strengthening overall laboratory and surveillance capacity within the country.

"I humbly accept this award on behalf of the Navy men and women who have partnered with your country to help improve the health of the people of Djibouti and those throughout the Horn of Africa," said Robinson. "Medicine builds bridges, builds trust and cooperation. Our partnership with Djibouti benefits both our countries."

NAMRU 3 is a large research facility based in Cairo with expertise in the infectious disease surveillance and public health issues. While the initial mission of the command was to maintain the health of deployed U.S. service men, NAMRU 3 has become an integral part of the public health system in Africa and across the Middle East. It has developed into the largest overseas military medical research facility in the world and plays a key role in terms of medical diplomacy. NAMRU 3 personnel and scientists routinely collaborate with regional research groups in the fields of disease surveillance, vaccine development and vector control for tropical diseases. They also train local scientists in areas of medical research and dealing with public health challenges.

Djibouti Minister of Health Abdullah Abdullah Miguil stated that through the support of his U.S. partners and the creation of a new public health law, the country has established a new National Institute of Public Health, which is designed to improve regional public health capacity.

"Our new institute's mission is to ensure the health security of the Djiboutian population and serve as a regional center of excellence for the Horn of Africa in areas related to infectious disease surveillance, research and control," said Miguil. "Our hope is that with the continued technical support from our partners, including NAMRU 3, this goal can be achieved."

Robinson was in Djibouti attending a first of its kind international scientific conference hosted by the Djibouti Ministry of Health Nov 13-14. The conference brought international government and civilian health industry leaders together to discuss ways to integrate efforts to bolster the public health programs throughout the Horn of Africa. The conference developed in partnership with the U.S. Navy, the U.S. Agency for International Development, UNICEF and many other international health organizations.

The conference focused on the security challenges involved with the spread of infectious diseases in today's interconnected world. According to Ken Earhart, India country director for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a local outbreak of a novel disease can quickly become a global issue due to the ease of global travel.

"Poor health systems are a security challenge," said Earhart. "The strategies to improving health security should encompass prevention, strengthening of public health systems and real partnership. While it's clear that poor health systems are security issues, we must remember they these also human, morale and humanitarian ones as well."

Robinson agreed with the security challenge presented with infectious diseases and stated the U.S. Navy was committed to working with global partners to identify challenges and work together to isolate disease where feasible to maintain conditions of stability.

"By helping those in need around the world, the United States not only helps bolster stability but also works to create conditions of hope, which are the foundations of healthy societies," said Robinson.

During his remarks at the closing ceremony, Robinson commended Djibouti as a leader amongst African militaries by maintaining high standards in professionalism, in the principle of civilian control and internationally recognized standards of conduct.

"Because your military is so professional, it makes it that much easier to do the work that we do together," said Robinson. "Our relationship is mutually beneficial because we share our findings with the local authorities throughout the Horn of Africa and help them develop their own capability of disease surveillance and treatment."

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