

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
May 23, 2008

CONTACT:  
Lisa Jones, 757-321-3252  
[ljones@operationssmile.org](mailto:ljones@operationssmile.org)

## **Operation Smile Joins USNS Mercy as Part of Four-Month Southeast Asia Deployment – Pacific Partnership 2008**

*Worldwide Children's Medical Charity Partners with U.S. Navy to Bring Smiles to Children in Philippines, Vietnam, Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea*

**NORFOLK, VA** – Operation Smile, a worldwide children's medical charity that provides free surgery to children in developing countries born with facial deformities, will join the United States Navy's hospital ship, USNS Mercy, during its summer 2008 humanitarian civic assistance deployment. The USNS Mercy mission, Pacific Partnership 2008, will provide humanitarian services to four countries in Southeast Asia. Pacific Partnership 2008 brings together host nation medical personnel, partner nation military medical and construction personnel, and non-governmental organizations to provide medical, dental, construction and other services ashore and afloat.

Operation Smile will be working side-by-side on the USNS Mercy in four countries: Philippines, Vietnam, Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea. Approximately 350 children suffering with cleft lips and cleft palates will receive free reconstructive surgery as a result of these medical missions.

Operation Smile Chief Medical Officer Dr. Randy Sherman said, "Operation Smile is honored to participate in the 2008 USNS Mercy Pacific Partnership deployment. After introducing ourselves to the Navy in 2006 during the Mercy mission to Bangladesh, we joined its sister ship, the USNS Comfort last year, for a multi-site partnership in Latin America. Operation Smile medical volunteers from the Philippines, Vietnam, Australia, the United States and other partner countries are excited to join with the Mercy and its crew in bringing new smiles to children throughout the Pacific basin this summer."

USNS Mercy departed from San Diego, Calif., on May 1. The first mission involving Operation Smile will take place in Cotabato, Philippines, in late May. Free medical evaluations will be conducted by Operation Smile medical volunteers, provided by Operation Smile Philippines, at Cotabato Regional Hospital to identify surgical patients who will then be transported aboard the ship for surgery. Post-operative checks for the patients a week after surgery will also take place at the hospital. The Philippines was Operation Smile's first partner country and since 1982, medical volunteers have provided more than 18,800 Filipino children and young adults with free physical examinations, and more than 13,700 have received life-changing surgery during medical missions.

USNS Mercy will move on to Nha Trang, Vietnam, for the next medical mission involving Operation Smile in mid-June. Free medical evaluations will be conducted by Operation Smile volunteers in General Hospital of Khanh Hoa Province to identify surgical patients. Operation Smile's medical

-more-

team, made up primarily of volunteers provided by Operation Smile Vietnam and Operation Smile Cambodia, will work with Navy personnel to conduct five days of surgery aboard the ship. Post-operative care will also take place at General Hospital of Khanh Hoa Province. Since 1989, Operation Smile has treated more than 19,000 children in Vietnam through international medical missions, in-country local missions and dental missions.

In mid-July, approximately 45 Operation Smile medical volunteers, many provided by Operation Smile Australia, will work with USNS Mercy's medical team in Dili, Timor-Leste. The Operation Smile team will provide free medical evaluations at a local hospital and patients will be brought onto the ship for surgery. This marks the first Operation Smile medical mission in Timor-Leste.

Operation Smile volunteers will join the USNS Mercy crew in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, in early August. Physical examinations will be provided at Port Moresby General Hospital and then the Operation Smile volunteer medical team, provided by Operation Smile Philippines, will work together for five days with the Navy to provide surgery aboard USNS Mercy. This will be Operation Smile's inaugural mission in Papua New Guinea.

Operation Smile is honored to be invited to join USNS Mercy's staff and crew on this deployment. In the summer of 2006, nearly 40 Operation Smile volunteers deployed with the USNS Mercy to Chittagong, Bangladesh and provided free physical examinations at Chittagong Medical College Hospital for more than 140 children. The 54 patients selected for surgery were transported by helicopter from Chittagong to USNS Mercy. Then in the summer of 2007, Operation Smile joined the USNS Comfort during its humanitarian assistance deployment. Operation Smile volunteers and the ship's medical team worked together during missions in Nicaragua, Peru and Colombia, providing more than 100 children with free reconstructive surgery.

**About Operation Smile ([www.operationssmile.org](http://www.operationssmile.org))**

Founded in 1982, Operation Smile, headquartered in Norfolk, Virginia, is a worldwide children's medical charity whose network of global volunteers are dedicated to helping improve the health and lives of children and young adults. Since its founding, Operation Smile volunteers have treated more than 115,000 children born with cleft lips, cleft palates and other facial deformities. In addition to contributing free medical treatment, Operation Smile trains local medical professionals in its 26 partner countries and leaves behind crucial equipment to lay the groundwork for long-term self-sufficiency.

###

**Media Notes:** To receive images, additional information, or to request an interview with an Operation Smile spokesperson, please contact Lisa Jones at [ljones@operationssmile.org](mailto:ljones@operationssmile.org) or 757-321-3252. For more information on USNS Mercy and Pacific Partnership 2008, visit [www.cpf.navy.mil](http://www.cpf.navy.mil).