

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONTACT:

Lisa Jones, 757-321-3252

[ljones@operationsmile.org](mailto:ljones@operationsmile.org)

## **Operation Smile Joins USS Kearsarge for *Continuing Promise 2008***

*Worldwide Children's Medical Charity Partners with U.S. Navy to Bring Smiles to Children in Nicaragua and Colombia*

**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 ship, USS Kearsarge (LHD 3), during its humanitarian assistance deployment. Continuing Promise 2008, a USSOUTHCOM directed operation, is an equal partnership mission designed to combine partner nation and U.S. relief capabilities to demonstrate the lasting bonds and shared interests among neighbors in the Caribbean, Central and South American regions. The mission 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 USS Kearsarge in two countries: Nicaragua and Colombia. Approximately 100 children suffering with cleft lips and cleft palates will receive free reconstructive surgery as a result of these medical missions.

Operation Smile Medical Officer Dr. Ruben Ayala said, "Operation Smile is honored to participate in the Continuing Promise 2008 deployment with USS Kearsarge, stationed in our hometown of Norfolk, Va. We have joined the Navy in 2006 during the Mercy mission to Bangladesh, worked with its sister ship, the USNS Comfort in 2007, for a multi-site partnership in Latin America, and this month are wrapping up missions conducted this summer with the Mercy in Southeast Asia. Operation Smile medical volunteers from Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, the United States and Venezuela are excited to join with the Kearsarge and its crew in bringing new smiles to children in Nicaragua and Colombia in August and September."

USS Kearsarge departs from Norfolk, Va., on August 6. The first mission involving Operation Smile will take place in Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua, in mid August. Free medical evaluations will be conducted by Operation Smile medical volunteers at Nuevo Amanecer Hospital to identify surgical patients who will then be transported aboard the ship for surgery. Operation Smile medical volunteers and Navy personnel will complete four days of surgery. Post-operative checks for the patients a week after surgery will also take place at the hospital. Nicaragua became an Operation Smile partner country in 1993, and since then, medical volunteers have provided more than 2,000 with life-changing surgery during international and in-country local medical missions.

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Kearsarge will move on to Santa Marta, Colombia, for the next medical mission involving Operation Smile in late August. Operation Smile medical volunteers from Colombia will work at Hospital Universitario Fernando Traconis to provide free physical examinations and surgery to children. Since 1988, Operation Smile has treated more than 5,400 children in Colombia through international medical missions, in-country local missions.

Operation Smile is honored to be invited to join Continuing Promise staff 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. From May-August 2008, Operation Smile joined the USNS Mercy during its summer 2008 humanitarian civic assistance deployment and worked together in the Philippines, Vietnam, Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea and has treated more than 220 patients suffering with cleft lips and cleft palates.

**About Operation Smile ([www.operationsmile.org](http://www.operationsmile.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 120,000 children born with cleft lips, cleft palates and other facial deformities and currently work in more than 40 countries. In addition to contributing free medical treatment, Operation Smile trains local medical professionals in its partner countries and leaves behind crucial equipment to lay the groundwork for long-term self-sufficiency.

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**Media Notes:** To receive images, additional information, or to request an interview with an Operation Smile spokesperson, please contact Lisa Jones at [ljones@operationsmile.org](mailto:ljones@operationsmile.org) or 757-321-3252. The USSOUTHCOM Web site, [www.southcom.mil](http://www.southcom.mil), will be the premier site for Continuing Promise. Details of the ship's mission will be posted at the U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command Web site at [www.cusns.navy.mil](http://www.cusns.navy.mil). For other details of the mission, contact CPR-8 PAO Ensign Daniel Day at [Daniel.day1@navy.mil](mailto:Daniel.day1@navy.mil) or 757-443-8378.