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## Bonhomme Richard Project Handclasp Reaches out to Timor-Leste

*By Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Drew Williams, USS Bonhomme Richard Public Affairs*

DILI, Timor-Leste -- Sailors from the amphibious assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD 6) presented four pallets of medical and hygiene supplies from Project Handclasp to local organizations October 17 in Dili, Timor-Leste.

Project Handclasp is the U.S. Navy's worldwide outreach program, providing humanitarian, educational and goodwill materials donated by America's businesses, non-governmental organizations and individuals to those in need around the world.

This year, the U.S. Navy distributed two pallets each to the Ministry of Health, Central Pharmacy Division, and the Coffee Cooperative Timor Health Clinics.

"It is our privilege to be here today as ambassadors of the United States to present these medical supplies to the Ministry of Health, Central Pharmacy Division and Coffee Cooperative Clinic," said Capt. Jonathan Harden, Executive Officer of Bonhomme Richard, during a small presentation ceremony in Dili. "The United States and Timor-Leste have a strong and growing relationship. We are looking forward to fostering that relationship and making new friends during our visit here."

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“All of the effort that led up to the delivery of Project Handclasp demonstrates the same spirit of generosity that inspired the American donors who contributed the material,” said Cmdr. John Shimotsu, Bonhomme Richard’s Command Chaplain. “In presenting the material to the local non-governmental organizations, we are demonstrating support for the health programs that operate in remote and materially poor areas.”

During the press conference, Germino Amaral dos Reis, Chairman of Cooperative Café Timor and one of the Timor-Leste business representatives who received donated medical supplies and hygiene products on behalf of Project Handclasp, presented Harden with bags of locally-grown coffee for the crew as a token of friendship between the two countries.

“America and Timor-Leste have a strong friendship,” added Amaral dos Reis. “And today is an example of that friendship.”

Project Handclasp in San Diego coordinated with Bonhomme Richard and arranged for the pallets of donated material to be delivered to Timor-Leste. Working with the Defense Attaché in Dili and the director of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Bonhomme Richard used all of its amphibious capabilities to deliver the pallets safely to shore.

“In a nation that is fighting against significant disease, the donated material will serve a modest yet important role,” continued Shimotsu. “From the comments by the leaders of the recipient organizations, it is clear that the Project Handclasp material will aid them in assisting some of the poorest people in the country.”

Sailors from the Bonhomme Richard Amphibious Ready Group and embarked Marines from 11<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit are participating in MAREX 2009, a multilateral exercise that promotes cooperation through civic action programs and training with the Timor-Leste and Australian militaries. The Bonhomme Richard ARG is transiting the U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet area of operation and reports to the Commander, Amphibious Force 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet, Rear Adm. Richard Landolt, who is headquartered in Okinawa, Japan.