

THE FUTURE OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF – A BOLD NEW APPROACH FOR A GLOBAL PREPAREDNESS

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As we witnessed this past year, Super Typhoon Haiyan devastated the inhabitants of East Asia and the Philippines. With sustained winds of 195 mph and gusts as strong as 235 mph, Haiyan was among the biggest storms ever recorded. In an instant, thousands of lives were lost, and many more were injured. Infrastructure was washed away due to extensive flooding. Governmental capacity struggled to respond under the weight of such destruction. As with so many other natural disasters, the lack of fresh water, food, and electricity, coupled with mass shock and bewilderment, result in chaos and lawlessness. There is an immediate need for help in the form of humanitarian assistance, emergency responders, and heavy equipment that can clear rubble, locate survivors, and treat the injured. Time is running out as children cry and adult survivors despair, desperately searching the horizon for hope, as death, disease, and darkness envelop the affected areas.

This brutal reality, just one of many variations of human cataclysm and suffering, plays out much too often around the globe, as a result of both natural and man-made disasters. Given the centuries-old need to provide for those in distress, it may come as a surprise that until now, there has been no quick-response platform designed and specifically directed to combat the calamities that so often bedevil humanity: earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, famine, and war. This could change, however, if The Coalition of Hope Foundation (COH) is able to motivate US officials with a bold new approach to international relief efforts.

The Coalition of Hope Foundation (COH), established in 2005, is a non-profit public charity that provides humanitarian assistance and disaster-relief support on a domestic (US) and international basis. Recent efforts include support of Hurricane Sandy victims, large-scale efforts in the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina, and in Haiti after the devastating earthquake of 2010.

The COH has proposed an audacious plan to utilize a retrofitted, former U.S. naval vessel (USS Nassau) to provide state-of-the-art hospital facilities staffed by multinational medical personnel within the context of a combined, international, public-private partnership.

As a former amphibious assault ship, the vessel will have airlift and amphibious capabilities to

deliver heavy equipment and emergency supplies in the role of a forward-deployed “quick-response” platform, as called for in time of catastrophe. Once operational, the COH expects to be able to respond to international emergencies faster and better equipped than any other military or civilian disaster-relief element currently in existence.

This unprecedented ship-based project has already been favorably reviewed at senior levels of the US Government and in other nations interested in supporting global humanitarian assistance efforts. The Coalition of Hope projects that once operational, the program will positively impact upwards of 20,000,000 lives around the world during the 18-year life-expectancy of the ship. Currently in the Atlantic Reserve Fleet “graveyard” in Beaumont, Texas, the Nassau is likely to be sold for scrap metal or sunk in a naval ordnance training exercise, should the United States not support the COH plan.

AN OLD SHIP’S REBIRTH

Keegan’s goal is to have the US Navy and other friendly foreign nations partner with the COH to reconfigure the ship for service as a multi-purpose, humanitarian assistance and disaster-relief vessel (HADRV). The Tarawa-class USS Nassau, decommissioned March 31st, 2011, has excellent existing design features, including aircraft hangars, a vast well deck, organic hospital capability (which the COH plans to expand), and acres of interior space in the ship’s hold, which can be quickly converted for humanitarian supplies, heavy equipment, and storage.

The cost of the effort is to be funded by contributions from existing governmental funding, other participating nations, private donations, and corporate sponsorships. The COH estimates the retrofitting cost at less than \$245 million dollars, with much of that benefiting the US shipyard (and its workers) who will carry out the conversion. Operational costs would be borne by participating countries and contributions by the United Nations, other non-governmental organizations, private donations, event revenue, and other licensing.

A senior medical planner at Headquarters, United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) noted that the Nassau, reconfigured and used as a medical relief ship, “would have the greatest level of human throughput of any vessel in existence, rapidly moving victims from disaster sites to medical attention aboard the vessel. Said the planner, “This would be a global game changer, as capability and speed equate to lives saved!!”

There may be no better time for The Coalition of

Hope to proffer the idea of a US-inspired, multinational, private-public partnership for humanitarian good. Pinched military budgets, ominous government debt, sequestration, public fatigue with war, the increasing frequency and severity of weather-related disasters, and the support of “smart power” doctrine among policy elites could make such an endeavor politically attractive, especially when combined with the domestic “jobs-creation” component associated with such a project. Keegan’s vision warrants serious consideration.

Over the past fifteen years, the broad concept of emergency humanitarian aid has become an international norm widely supported among governments and the public of donor countries. Some international aid experts calculate that one in five people in the past decade have been touched, directly or indirectly, by the efforts of humanitarian crisis responders. That’s a fifth of humanity!

In times of disaster, the COH vessel is envisioned to be underway at sea with the required staff and supplies aboard. And as the ship is sailing towards the affected area, additional supplies and staff would be air-lifted aboard in advance of the ship’s arrival, in order to provide a more robust and flexible force specifically trained for the particular type of disaster encountered. Operational speed, pre-positioned personnel, and quantity of supplies are what make the concept innovative. According to Keegan, “This would also be the case in support of relief efforts in the Philippines. We would arrive right behind the trailing edge of the typhoon and immediately begin working relief efforts.”

“Our ship will be able to provide a fully functional on-board command and control operations center,” he continues, “complete with global communications and requisite situational technology. In addition, by providing a secured environment for government, multinational military-medical leadership, outside response organizations, the media, and others, we will overcome the often disjointed and chaotic atmosphere that happens after a catastrophe. Our ship’s physical size allows for this much needed capability.”

Keegan states that the COH does not intend to replace any assets or actors in the current regime of multilateral humanitarianism, becoming instead a “force multiplier.” The COH proposes operating within existing protocols of the United Nations, USAID, and International Red Cross in an augmented capacity. Keegan says, “.....able to favorably impact crisis areas faster, more efficiently, and at greater scale than has ever been accomplished.”

ECOLOGICAL DISASTER RESPONSE

An environmental disaster is a disaster to the natural



environment due to human activity, which distinguishes it from the concept of a natural disaster. Environmental disasters can have a direct effect on agriculture, biodiversity, the economy, and human health. The causes include pollution, depletion of natural resources, industrial activity, or agriculture. The COH and her crew will also be able to support research, emergency containment, and remediation as a component of our overall humanitarian assistance and disaster-relief mission in conjunction with international Coast Guard efforts and others.

ANIMAL RESCUE AND EVACUATION

The Coalition of Hope planning includes the capability to rescue animals, as well as people, from crisis situations. This capability will provide an emotional rescue, by allowing displaced people to remain in contact with their “animal family members.” As Margo McKnight, Executive Director of the Wildlands Network and an advisor to the COH Foundation, recently opined, “That the Coalition of Hope Foundation would equip their rescue vessels to accommodate animals when a catastrophe strikes is farsighted and visionary. When a disaster occurs, providing food, water, clothing, and safety, although difficult, is usually possible. Providing emotional rescue is far more complex.”

“SKILLS RICH” IN MILITARY AND NATION BUILDING EXPERIENCE

The Coalition of Hope is described in its

organizational literature as “skills rich,” meaning that Keegan has on both the COH Board of Directors and his International Advisory Board dozens of experienced people with the deep political, business, educational, military, philanthropic, and diplomatic backgrounds needed in order to execute his broad vision; individuals who have extensive leadership experience in combat zones, nation-building initiatives, logistics, and mass casualty trauma care in particular. It will take an incredibly diverse mix of skills, a blending of the military and the civilian, a harmonious “all hands on deck,” to make a global program as sophisticated as the one COH envisions to function in the extreme environment of mega-disasters. Endemic to the Coalition of Hope is an international presence of nation-state participants. The idea of a multinational crew, says Keegan, is central to the ship’s identity, function, and global appeal.



Caitlin Marie Bell

CELEBRITY SUPPORTERS

According to Keegan, it is an organizational goal that when unexpected tragedy and despair strike, the COH Foundation will be able to respond immediately in order to alleviate the crisis and save lives. In conjunction with host nations, the United Nations, and other relief providers, the COH organization seeks to augment and support international cooperation on a global basis. “If we can bring the nations of the world together in times of peril, then we can build upon these foundations in times of peace.”

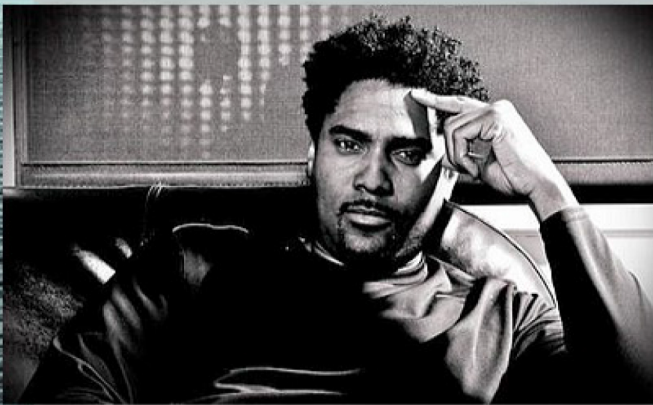
Caitlin Marie Bell is a Folk musician currently living and performing in Brooklyn, New York. Originally from Snellville, Georgia, Caitlin developed a serious interest in pursuing a career in music at a young age. Caitlin studied at the world-renowned Oberlin Conservatory, where she earned a bachelor’s degree in vocal performance.

“Disasters create so many needs that must be met over an extended period of time. It is essential that resources are generated and appropriately placed to help overcome the devastation inflicted by natural catastrophe. Music and art often unite in times of hardship to raise awareness and generate resources to meet

the needs of local, national, and international communities. Artists have always been known for their social conscience. This social consciousness of artists has resulted in a culture of giving; creating forums that raise awareness of community needs, as well as generating funds that effect positive change. These efforts embody the spirit of The Coalition of Hope Foundation, and I look forward to the opportunity of adding my talents and experience to those already involved in this wonderful organization.”

Mark Brown is a successful writer, producer, and director most widely known for penning and producing MGM's hit comedies *Barbershop* and *Barbershop 2: Back in Business*, which have a combined gross of over \$300 million at the box office worldwide. The *Barbershop* franchise has earned its place as the most lucrative African-American-themed franchise in filmmaking history. (*Barbershop I* - Budget 12M, Box 75M, Ancillary 80M, Gross 155M; *Barbershop 2* - Budget 23M, Box 65M, Ancillary 70M, Gross 135M) The *Barbershop* films starred Ice Cube, Cedric the Entertainer, and Eve. Recently, Brown serves as executive producer of BET's #1 reality show, *Baldwin Hills*, and has stepped into an executive roll as CEO of Xonger Global Entertainment Network, which Brown co-founded in 2007. Under Brown's direction, Xonger is set for a worldwide introduction in early 2009. Brown also sits as senior vice president of China Digital World, a newly formed venture through an exclusive partnership with CCTV (China Central Television).

Mark Brown



“Having worked with COH in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy, I was impressed with their organizational ability to move quickly in difficult circumstances, adapt when needed, and remain focused in their intent to assist those in desperate need, irrespective of the obstacles. I look forward to continuing my affiliation with this noble organization and to the launch of their groundbreaking Excelsior project.”

Christopher J. Gambino is no stranger to the spotlight. “Mr. G,” as he is known to his friends and associates, has lived a remarkable life, encompassing both difficult experiences, as well as notable success. An accomplished author, actor, and entrepreneur, his is a story of perseverance, learning from



Christopher J. Gambino

mistakes and overcoming life's challenges. “I have always been drawn to helping others. What impresses me most about the Coalition of Hope is their dedication and ability to provide support to those in need on a global basis. Their scope of capability and network of global personnel make them a truly unique organization. I am proud to be counted among their supporters.”

TIMOTHY KEEGAN INTERVIEW

First off, I want to thank you for giving our readers the opportunity to know more about who you are and what COH can do to help people during a natural disaster.

TAMMY KC HEGYES: How is COH different than other organizations?

TIMOTHY KEEGAN: There are a number of attributes that differentiate COH from other charitable foundations. Firstly, COH focuses on global humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Once we accept a mission, we take on the worst of large-scale disasters as fast as we can, and then stay longer than others. Our organizational military, diplomatic, and law enforcement experience are very useful and somewhat unique in the NGO community. Our flat management approach allows us to be quicker, more adaptable, and as a consequence, more efficient relative to other assistance organizations, most of which have layers of decision-making, conferences, and working groups to overcome before they can actually move forward.

HEGYES: Even in this day and age, most are not

aware of their surroundings, or if they are, they're lost when something happens, not knowing what to do during a natural disaster. Can you explain what COH can do for them when an event arises?

KEEGAN: In times of great distress, it is uniquely comforting to know that others care and are willing to help. It is even better once they arrive!! No two disasters are the same. Overseas missions pose unique challenges, depending upon the type of disaster and the country effected. Domestic (US) assistance is usually coordinated in conjunction with local, state, and federal government response agencies. Generally, COH seeks to quickly assess the situation; make a determination if we have the skill sets and capability to be impactful. If the decision is to participate, then we assemble a quick-response team who then establishes our presence within the affected area and begins the coordination of funding, supplies, and personnel. As mentioned previously, our ability to quickly respond and adapt to the chaos on the ground differentiates us and has allowed us to provide direct assistance much sooner than most other non-governmental organizations.

HEGYES: How can one get involved with COH?

KEEGAN: The easiest way to connect with COH is through our websites or via Facebook. Our COH social network can be found at www.cohrelief.org or through our primary organizational site, which may be viewed at www.coalitionofhope.org. Simply establish an account, and we will contact you/announce needs as the situation arises. At present, we have in excess of 146,000 COH members on a global basis.

HEGYES: After speaking with you via phone, you were telling me that you are or were a part of the entertainment world. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

KEEGAN: Yes, when I was younger, I appeared in approximately 30 TV commercials, several films, and a number of TV shows. Entertainment and the art of communication through the spoken word, film, or music is key in translating thoughts to actions. I only wish I were more talented in this arena.

HEGYES: Fundraising and support is a big factor when giving a helping hand, and celebrities can be a huge asset to bringing the awareness to people for this same reason. Do you feel that this is beneficial to your cause? And if so, do you have future events coming up that will bring it to their attention?

KEEGAN: Fundraising is a key component to all we do. No amount is too small (or too big), and we are very aware that as an organization, we are trustees of other's money. I should mention that none of the COH leadership draws a salary. In fact, our organization had been self-funded from our inception in 2005 until 2013, when we decided that broader financial capability was needed in order to optimize planning and sustain our growth.

We have had a great response by those in the entertainment industry, especially as relates to the Excelsior project. Once the ship is operational, I foresee countless opportunities for concerts and other charitable events aboard ship. If we can get the White House to approve the project in 2014, we may be able to complete the vessel refit and support the Brazilian Olympics in 2016. It would be a great "coming out" party for what would be the only ship of its kind ever launched.

HEGYES: Again I want to thank you for speaking with me, and for those who are seeking more information about COH, you can find them at their official website www.coalitionofhope.org/ and on two social networks: www.COHRelief.org and Facebook at www.facebook.com/coalitionofhopefoundation.



Timothy Keegan