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[more...](#)

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[more...](#)

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Weather

[▶ Horn Of Africa](#)
[▶ Ethiopia](#)

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Flip Flops for Foreign Friends

Story by Angela Scherbenske CJTF-HOA

CAMP LEMONIER, Djibouti — Starting with the small vision of providing shoes for local people he encountered, U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Brian Kellner created Flip Flops for Foreign Friends. The outreach program provides donated flip flops to individuals outside the wire who the 6th Provisional Security Company encounters while at Camp Lemonier.

"This project is another way that we, (CJTF-HOA members) can get out and show the people of this region that we are a loving and peaceful nation," said Kellner. "If we can give them hope, even with a 99 cent pair of flip flops, then when they grow up they will remember how much America cares about them and that we want to be their friends."

The Flip Flops for Foreign Friends program is still in the beginning phases of collecting, storing and planning projects for the 6th PSC to distribute the flip flops in the upcoming months. Flip flops are the popular footwear in Djibouti because they wear easy and can withstand the heat.

U.S. Marine Capt. Timothy Matthews, civil affairs coordinator for this project, said many of the Marines in the 6th PSC came to Djibouti not just for the sole purpose of guarding the camp, but also hoping to make a positive change in the lives of the people here.

"The Flip Flops for Foreign Friends program has been a way for the PSC Marines to see tangible results right away," said Matthews. "We know that our small part in securing the camp helps CJTF-HOA accomplish its mission of stabilizing the region in the long term, but the immediacy of seeing a child smile when given a pair of flip flops or a new soccer ball is priceless."

The PSC Marine unit contacted individual family members in areas such as Virginia Beach, Va., Seattle, Wash., and other areas throughout the United States to ask for donated flip flops for this program. U.S. Marine Lance Cpl. Todd Fowler did his part by setting up a website on <http://www.anymarine.com> and requested donations of flip flops and other items for the people of Djibouti.

U.S. Marine Lance Cpl. Stefan Ayotte is another member in the unit who has taken the time to reach out to ask his family for donated shoes.

"I contacted my mother to ask her if she could offer assistance with this program and she sent out a press release and initiated drop boxes for collecting flip flops at her place of work," said Ayotte.

Approximately 1,000 pairs of flip flops have been received to date, which have been donated from companies, schools and individual family members and friends of the 6th PSC. In addition to the flip flops, the unit is also receiving school supplies, clothes, toys and other similar items. "The Flip Flops for Foreign Friends Program is our way of making a small difference in Djiboutians' lives," said Matthews. "The program has added the benefit of pulling the unit together to accomplish a goal outside the normal mission."

The 6th PSC has already distributed approximately 35 pairs of flip flops and soccer balls to Dooda Village, Djibouti. They also have set up a gym in the village with athletic equipment, which they constructed by hand.

In the future, the 6th PSC plans to sponsor events, such as soccer games, where afterwards the flip flops and other donated items will be given out to the local people.

The mission of CJTF-HOA is to prevent conflict, promote regional stability and protect coalition interests in order to prevail against extremism. The CJTF-HOA organization began operations at Camp Lemonier, Djibouti May 13, 2003. It works with partner nations on humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, consequence management, civic action programs to include medical and veterinary care, school and medical clinic construction and water development projects.



DOUDA VILLAGE, Djibouti (April 2007) -- U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Brian Kellner hands out flip-flops [shoes] as a part of the "Flip-Flops for Foreign Friends Program at the Douda Village school. (Photo courtesy of 6th PSC, U.S. Marine Corps)
([Large Image](#). [Hi-Res Image](#).)

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