Boeing Holds 'Major Join' Ceremony for 12-Nation Strategic Airlift Capability's 1st C-17

LONG BEACH, Calif., March 13, 2009 -- Boeing [NYSE: BA] today marked a key milestone at its C-17 final assembly facility in Long Beach -- the "major join" ceremony for the Strategic Airlift Capability (SAC) consortium's first C-17 Globemaster III. The unique SAC approach to shared use of the strategic airlifter was hailed as a model for the future acquisition and management of defense capabilities for NATO and European Union (EU) missions.

During major join, the C-17 airlifter's four major sections -- the forward, center and aft fuselages and wing assembly -- are integrated, and the aircraft begins to look like a C-17 for the first time. Hundreds of C-17 employees looked on as senior members of SAC and representatives of the government of the Republic of Hungary, NATO, and Boeing drove ceremonial rivets into the aircraft's fuselage.

Hungarian Minister of Defense Dr. Imre Szekeres played a special symbolic role in the ceremony, since Hungary has agreed to both host the Heavy Airlift Wing (HAW) at Pápa Air Base, where a total of three C-17s will be based, and to register the aircraft under the Hungarian flag.

"SAC is a great example to see that cooperation and mutual finance strengthen capabilities and efficiency both within NATO and two EU countries outside NATO. It is a model for future cooperation," said Szekeres.

"Strategic airlift is critical in responding to today's global challenges," said Peter Flory, NATO Assistant Secretary General for Defence Investment. "SAC1 represents a big step forward in strengthening our ability to support NATO, EU, United Nations and other military, humanitarian, disaster-relief, and peacekeeping missions around the world."

The SAC1 C-17's first flight is set for June, with delivery tentatively scheduled for early July. SAC includes 10 NATO nations -- Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, United States -- and Partnership for Peace members Sweden and Finland. They will share acquisition and operating costs for three C-17s over the nearly 30-year course of the agreement.

As chairman of the SAC Steering Board, Brig. Gen. Richard Johnston, U.S. Air Force, shared his thoughts during the ceremony: "No nation today is independent of those around it," he said. "These two Partnership for Peace and 10 NATO nations will succeed in bringing airlift to meet their national needs while working together through unwavering cooperation and partnership."

"We have more than 70 airmen and families from the SAC nations working and living in Pápa, and our personnel strength grows each week," said the HAW's first commander, Col. John Zazworsky, U.S. Air Force. "With loadmasters and pilots already in training, we are on course for multinational flight operations as planned this summer." The colonel has been at work at Pápa Air Base since October.

"The C-17 is the only tactical aircraft capable of performing all SAC airlift missions, including strategic, tactical, military and humanitarian missions, as well as brigade airdrops, aeromedical evacuations, and landings and takeoffs from standard runways or austere airfields," said Tommy Dunehew, Boeing International C-17 program manager. "SAC's commitment to the C-17 is yet another example of the value the C-17 has to international customers."

Acting on behalf of SAC, the NATO Airlift Management Agency (NAMA), led by General Manager Gunnar Borch, signed an agreement with the U.S. government in November for the acquisition of three C-17s, one of which will be provided by the United States. NAMA provides acquisition, financial and human-resources support to the HAW, and has also been active since the fall in bringing this new concept to life.

A unit of The Boeing Company, Boeing Integrated Defense Systems is one of the world's largest space and defense businesses specializing in innovative and capabilities-driven customer solutions, and the world's largest and most versatile manufacturer of military aircraft. Headquartered in St. Louis, Boeing Integrated Defense Systems is a $32 billion business with 70,000 employees worldwide.

###
Contact Info:
Jerry Drelling
Boeing Global Mobility Systems
(562) 593-5233
jerry.a.drelling@boeing.com

Additional assets available online: Photos (1)