Operation Florian in Tanzania.

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Following an approach from the Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA) for assistance in providing firefighting equipment and training in Tanzania, East Africa, I travelled to Dar es Salaam with Mr Jagtar Singh (AFSA), Mr Akwala Deol (AFSA) and Richard Johnes, Fire Service College, to gauge if Operation Florian could be of any assistance.

The provision of fire and rescue services in Tanzania is complex to say the least, the fire service providers are as follows:

1) The National Fire & Rescue Service.
2) Private security firms.
3) The Port Authority.
4) The Airport Fire Service.

The National Fire & Rescue Service, is woefully under funded and under equipped and is only located in the major cities with no fire cover in the suburbs or rural areas.

Equipment is predominantly of UK design and specification and well maintained although the three pumping appliances in Dar es Salaam have, at present, no hydraulic rescue capability. This is for a city of approximately 1 million people. This fire cover is supplemented by five private fire and security companies who back up the National Service on major incidents however, our findings are this is neither reliable nor consistent and lacks clear command and control.

Private Security Firms, provide a fee-paying service to the wealthy firms, families and diplomatic complexes within the main cities. However, there is a system in place, enforced by law, that in the event of a serious incident they will attend and co-operate with the National Fire Service. They operate under the command of the City Fire Commissioner and we believe make no charge for their services except to replenish any consumables used.

The private firms due to the nature of their business only provide cover in the commercial and wealthy residential areas of the larger cities and do not venture out to the suburbs unless they have a contract in the area.

The Airport and Port Authority, provide cover for their respective charges but will, when required, back up the National Fire Service on the same basis as the private firms.

We met with the Rt. Hon. Lawrence Masha MP, Minister for Home Affairs to discuss the priorities we had identified during our visit and explained how our newly formed partnership may be able to provide assistance.



L – R Akwala Deol, Rt. Hon. Lawrence Masha MP, Minister for Home Affairs, Bob Rearie and Richard Johnes

My report to the trustees set out how, working in partnership with AFSA and the College, Operation Florian could play a central role in providing a fire service in the most needy communities of Dar es Salaam and is summarised here;

1. Supply of 3 fire appliances and equipment from the Fire Service College. These appliances would be used to provide a free fire service to the poorer communities which make up the suburbs of Dar es Salaam and will come under the Government scheme to support the National Fire service. The personnel for the appliances would be selected from the local communities and staffed on a Retained Duty System.

2. A two week retained training course to cover the basic skills. Further equipment and training will be required (BA & RTC) at a later date.

   Finance for this project was always going to be an issue due to the distance involved. However a prominent businessman and friend of Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete, Mr Subhash Patel, offered to finance the whole project, this would include all shipping costs, instructors travel costs and expenses.



Two of the ex College appliances

The appliances left the UK in January 2008 followed by the equipment in June with a view to the training being carried out in August which is one of the coolest months with temperatures dropping to a lowly average of 25 degrees! Delays with customs led to the equipment not being available until the start of Ramadan thus putting the schedule back another month.

With all equipment and appliances safely through customs and all other entry checks completed, the three instructors (Bob Rearie FSC, David Langer ex Cheshire and Staci Leach (Northants) set off for Dar es Salaam on 3rd of October 2008.



Mr Subhash Patel, Bob Rearie, David Langer and Staci Leach

The humidity was noticeable as we came off the plane; this coupled with the heat would prove problematic as the training progressed!

We set off early on Saturday morning to inspect the training facilities and check on progress (if any) with the kitting up of the appliances!

Sunday inevitably! Was taken up with kitting up the appliances!

To be fair, our hosts had fully repainted and repaired the trucks and had them looking like new.



After restoration

Our classroom would be the envy of most UK fire services with a full compliment of I.T equipment, air con and of course a view that would be hard to beat!



Our Students

Initially we were given 48 students, we would eventually cut this down to 25 by the end of week one.

Week one went extremely well with most of our students keen to impress, the working day started around 0830 and finished at 1700, well that was in UK time, African time differs by about an hour either way.



Practical session



Dave explaining the finer points of dam building!

Week two saw the remaining 25 put through there paces on a daily basis, with ladders, pumps and hose handling a particular focus.

Four Crew Commanders have been seconded to mentor and supervise their development until our return in the New Year when we will carry out the next phase of training.



The successful trainees after the passing out parade

This project has the potential to change the lives of millions of people in a rapidly developing country. As investment in the country continues, the infrastructure has to keep pace. This is not going to be possible without outside help. Tanzania is a major recipient of world aid and is one of the most stable countries in Africa but they must focus at this point in combating poverty therefore funds for the development of a first class fire and rescue service are not readily available.

Together we can help the people of Tanzania build a fire and rescue service equal to any in the developing world.