



MEDIA RELEASE

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

56th Fighter Wing
Office of Public Affairs
14185 W. Falcon St.
Luke AFB, AZ 85309-1629

Phone – (623) 856-6011
FAX – (623) 856-6013
After duty hours – (623) 856-5600
www.luke.af.mil

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LUKE F-16s DEPLOYING TO PHILIPPINES FOR JOINT, ALLIED EXERCISE

LUKE AIR FORCE BASE, Arizona - More than 70 Airmen and F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft from here are deploying to a joint and bi-lateral exercise in the central Luzon Province of the Philippines from 16 to 30 April.

At the invitation of the Government of the Philippines, Airmen from the 56th Fighter Wing here will conduct operational, tactical training and civic assistance missions with the armed forces of the Philippines and other U.S. services during Exercise Balikatan '09.

True to the meaning of the Tagalog word “balikatan,” they will work “shoulder-to-shoulder” with the Philippine Air Force, the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps.

"We are extremely proud to participate in this exercise," said Brig. Gen. Kurt Neubauer, 56th FW commander. "The United States and the Republic of the Philippines are close friends and have a long history of working together."

This will be the first time F-16 fighters have participated in Balikatan and the first time in 16 years Air Force fighter aircraft will operate out of the Philippines, said Lt. Col. Jack Maixner, 63rd Fighter Squadron commander.

"Operational and tactical training with other services and countries vastly improves our ability to operate in real-world situation," said Colonel Maixner. "All air and ground participants will benefit greatly from sharing. Ideas, tactics, and techniques during mission planning, execution, and debrief."

The 63rd FS is leading the deployment but the Luke contingent will include operations, maintenance and medical Airmen from various squadrons.

This is the 25th exercise in the Balikatan series and will consist of three simultaneous events -- humanitarian and civic assistance, a scenario-based staff exercise to practice joint force management at the headquarters level and a cross training and field exercise.

Flying will not be the only mission on the agenda. The Airmen are also slated to participate in the civic assistance portion of the exercise.

"We have collected school supplies and sporting goods which we will deliver to local Philippine orphanages," said Colonel Maixner. "There will also be an open house allowing the local populace to get an up-close look at an F-16."

The U.S. Pacific Command's III Marine Expeditionary Force is the exercise organizer from the U.S. side. This type of bilateral training is vital to maintaining readiness capabilities for both the U.S. and Philippine armed forces and is being conducted according to agreements made by both governments -- in particular, the Mutual Defense Treaty and the Visiting Forces Agreement.

"Personally, I am looking forward to meeting my counterparts in the Philippine Air Force to exchange ideas about the military profession and tactical aviation," said Colonel Maixner.