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## CNO Calls Diversity a Strategic Imperative

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From Chief of Naval Operations Public Affairs

PATUXENT RIVER, Md. (NNS) -- Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. Mike Mullen addressed a packed audience at the Naval Air Systems Command Total Force Diversity Day here June 29.

Mullen left no doubt about the importance of pursuing diversity at every level in the Navy, calling it a "strategic imperative" and reminding the attendees that the Navy is engaged around the globe.

"Having the cultural skills, having the diverse backgrounds in order to literally achieve our mission is really critical", said Mullen. "That is why [diversity] is a strategic imperative."

This level of engagement, he argued, requires a much better understanding of cultural norms and values than Sailors typically have right now.

While the CNO noted that the Navy has made great strides in improving diversity in recent years, the pace of globalization and the war on terrorism have made it necessary to renew those efforts and adopt change even faster.

"We've got to create a sense of urgency and a belief and a commitment," he said. "Leadership has to say it: 'We've got to change.'"

Mullen noted that the Navy has created a new Diversity Concept of Operations, which lays the groundwork for how the service will seek to improve both awareness and opportunities at all leadership levels.

Diversity, the CNO stressed, is about creating opportunities for all, not breaking down barriers for some. And he pressed the audience hard to begin a healthy dialogue about the subject.

"Part of how we got here is because we're afraid to talk about the subject. We don't know how to talk about it. We've got to get over that. Amongst friends, it's a challenging issue. We worry about ticking people off, about saying the wrong thing," he said.

Understanding one another's concerns was a vital first step to making progress, Mullen argued. "I can't see diversity from a minority position," he noted. "I have not grown up in those shoes. I didn't live that way, and I need help understanding it. And I need understanding that that is the case, not an expectation that I would pick it up instantly."

Mullen also encouraged leaders in the Navy to take on what he termed "accountable mentorship." He argued that leaders must consider it a primary responsibility to ensure the success of those they mentor, aggressively tracking career milestones.

"As a mentor, it's my responsibility to make sure that individual makes it," he said. "We have got to get [diversity] right or it jeopardizes us as an institution.

"The Navy is my command," Mullen added, "and this is a big part of making sure we get it right."

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