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Contact: Kelsey Larson
Kelsey.larson@resoluteconsulting.com
(312) 768-4768

Launch of Indiana National Guard Slovak Shield 2016 Highlights Full Capabilities of Gary/Chicago International Airport

Gary, Ind. (September 21, 2016) – Buoyed by the extended runway and first-in-class logistical support, the Indiana National Guard last week launched a month-long, joint exercise with the Slovak Armed Forces from Gary/Chicago International Airport (GYI). The mission highlights the airport’s growing capabilities and underscores what the airport offers to the public and private sectors.

On Friday, two C-17 Globemaster III transport aircraft, from the West Virginia National Guard, loaded with four Black Hawk helicopters and Indiana National Guardsmen took off from GYI for a nonstop trip to Slovakia. A C-130 Hercules transport aircraft from the Georgia National Guard, fully-loaded with support equipment for the mission also departed from the airport earlier in the week. The Indiana National Guard has been a partner to the Slovak Armed Forces for more than 20 years as part of the National Guard’s State Partnership Program (SPP). In 2009, the Guard established a permanent presence at GYI, constructing a \$28 million armory and flight readiness center

The airport held briefings during the week for community leaders, including Mayor Karen Freeman Wilson, Gary Common Council President Ron Brewer and Gary Police Chief Larry McKinley and leaders of the Gary Chamber of Commerce, Northwest Indiana Forum and other community groups and organizations ahead of the Indiana National Guard’s departure to participate in Slovak Shield 2016. Rosemary Macko Wisnosky, honorary counsel of the Slovak Republic, also attended and spoke to the group to wish them well.

“The Indiana National Guard is a trusted partner. The construction of a readiness and flight facility at the Gary/Chicago International Airport almost a decade ago presented a huge boost for the airport and the entire Northwest Indiana region, and the City of Gary is honored to play host to the launch of Slovak Shield 2016,” said City of Gary Mayor Karen Freeman Wilson. “The scale of this mission showcases the airport’s growth and expanding capabilities to meet the needs of most industries and sectors.”

With a permanent and growing presence at the airport, the Indiana National Guard calls GYI a potential Power Projection Platform, giving the Guard easy access to the resources needed to launch critical training and combat missions. Completed just over one year ago, the airport’s \$174 million runway



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expansion was a factor in the Guard's decision to launch the mission from GYY. Airport officials also stressed GYY's unique capabilities, including its non-congested airspace that allows aircraft to easily take off and land, and the space and infrastructure needed to manage large-scale operations.

"The Indiana National Guard has a strong and growing presence in northwest Indiana and our cooperation with the airport reflects our commitment to the region," said Lieutenant Colonel Matthew Handy of the Indiana National Guard. "It would have been very difficult to launch a mission from the airport with this type of heavy equipment and fully fueled aircraft before the runway extension. Given the airport's infrastructure, location and logistical support team, we hope Slovak Shield 2016 is the first of many missions and deployments in the future originating at Gary/Chicago International Airport."

"We look forward to supporting future National Guard missions and making sure the private sector is aware of the airport's capabilities," added Gary/Chicago International Airport Board Chairman Stephen Mays.

GYY fixed based operator Gary Jet Center provided logistical support to the mission.

To view photographs from the Slovak Shield 2016 launch, [click here](#). All photographs should be attributed to Gary/Chicago International Airport.

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