

SAFETY AND SECURITY OF PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

HEARING BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH CONGRESS

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SAFETY AND SECURITY OF PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24, 2004

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to call, at 10:36 a.m. in Room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Henry J. Hyde (Chairman of the Committee) presiding.

Chairman HYDE. The Committee will come to order. Good morning, and welcome to this morning's hearing of the Committee on International Relations.

The purpose of today's hearing is to examine the safety and security practices of the Peace Corps. The Members of this Committee drafted a Peace Corps bill last year that authorizes the doubling of the Peace Corps. That measure was included in H.R. 1950, which passed the House by a vote of 382 to 42 in July 2003. Next week, the Committee will consider additional legislation intended to improve the security and safety of our Peace Corps Volunteers. Today, we are going to hear from a distinguished group of witnesses each with firsthand experience in matters of safety and security of Peace Corps Volunteers.

We come here as supporters of the Peace Corps, admirers of their sacrifice and of the important work they do. It is for that reason that today we wish to inquire into the adequacy of safety and security practices that will govern their assignment in dangerous places around the world.

Instead of a lengthy opening statement, I would like to read for you brief excerpts from three important documents on this topic which we will explore and refer to throughout today's hearing.

The first excerpt is from a GAO, General Accounting Office, report on Peace Corps safety and security dated July 2002:

"The Peace Corps is embarking on a major expansion of its volunteer work force during a time of heightened risk for Americans living abroad. Providing safety and security for its volunteers is the Peace Corps' higher priority. Our review of the agency's efforts to ensure compliance with its basic safety and security policies and guidelines show that there are cases of uneven implementation of key elements of the safety and security framework that could pose risks to volunteers. These include uneven performance in developing safe and secure housing and worksites, responding to volunteer concerns and planning for emergencies."

The second excerpt is from a recent investigative series by the *Dayton Daily News* dated October 27, 2003:

“Every minute of every day for more than 2½ years now Walter and Sheila Poirier have lived with a grim reality. They may never know what happened to their son.

“‘Our concentration is still on finding Walter,’ Sheila said. ‘He is probably not alive, but he may be.’

“Long ago, their grief turned to anger, and their anger is directed squarely at the Peace Corps. They believe the agency should have been watching more closely, and they are not alone.

“‘We believe that the Peace Corps severely failed their people, their volunteers, and knowing what I know there is no way I would let my children volunteer for the Peace Corps unless there was some immediate changes and serious changes in the Peace Corps,’ said the General Accounting Office’s Patrick Sullivan, who spent 23 years as a U.S. Secret Service agent. ‘There is no way I would put my children or recommend to anybody I know to put their loved ones in that situation.’

“Sullivan and John Cooney went to Bolivia on behalf of the GAO’s Office of Special Investigations to review the Peace Corps’ handling of the case.”

The third excerpt is from the GAO report referenced in the previous excerpt dated July 20, 2001. It reads as follows:

“Both the Country Director and Deputy Country Director for the Peace Corps in Bolivia told us, the GAO, that the Associate Director was not keeping close enough contact with Mr. Poirier.”

The report also states:

“The Associate Director also said that he became so busy supervising the other volunteers that Mr. Poirier ‘dropped of my radar screen.’ He said he made no further attempt to contact Mr. Poirier.”

The GAO report is summarized in the following statement, and I quote:

“The Peace Corps failed to properly supervise Mr. Poirier and lost track of him.”

The purpose of today’s hearing is to understand the Peace Corps’s efforts to develop and ensure compliance with basic safety and security policies for Peace Corps Volunteers. Today’s hearing will provide Members with necessary background information on the problems that have existed in recent years and as a case study will examine the specific problems and management failures that led to and followed the disappearance of a volunteer in Bolivia, Walter J. Poirier.

The hearing will provide Members with an opportunity to understand the policy and organizational changes made within the Peace Corps over the past 2 years toward the goal of improving safety and security of volunteers.

This hearing will also provide Members with the context for the additional legislation to be considered next week, the Peace Corps

Safety and Security Act of 2004. That bill will create a more independent Inspector General, will establish the position of Ombudsman of the Peace Corps, and will statutorily create the Office of Safety and Security.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hyde follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE HENRY J. HYDE, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, AND CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Good morning, and welcome to this morning's hearing of the Committee on International Relations. The purpose of today's hearing is to examine the safety and security practices of the Peace Corps. The members of this Committee crafted a Peace Corps bill last year that authorizes the doubling of the Peace Corps. That measure was included in H.R. 1950, which passed the House by a vote of 382 to 42 in July, 2003. Next week, the Committee will consider additional legislation intended to improve safety and security of our Peace Corps volunteers. Today, we will hear from a distinguished group of witnesses, each with firsthand experience in matters of safety and security of Peace Corps volunteers.

We come here as supporters of the Peace Corps; admirers of their sacrifice and of the important work they do. It is for that reason that today we wish to inquire into the adequacy of safety and security practices that will govern their assignment in dangerous places around the world.

Instead of a lengthy opening statement, I would like to read for you brief excerpts from three important documents on this topic, which we will explore and refer to throughout today's hearing.

The first excerpt is from a GAO report on Peace Corps safety and security, dated in July 2002:

The Peace Corps is embarking on a major expansion of its volunteer workforce during a time of heightened risk for Americans living abroad. Providing safety and security for its volunteers is the Peace Corps' highest priority. Our review of the agency's efforts to ensure compliance with its basic safety and security policies and guidelines shows that there are cases of uneven implementation of key elements of the safety and security framework that could pose risks to volunteers. These include uneven performance in developing safe and secure housing and work sites, responding to volunteer concerns, and planning for emergencies.

The second excerpt is from a recent investigative series by the *Dayton Daily News*, dated October 27, 2003:

Every minute of every day for more than two and a half years now, Walter and Sheila Poirier have lived with a grim reality: They may never know what happened to their son.

"Our concentration is still on finding Walter," Sheila said. "He's probably not alive, but he may be alive."

Long ago, their grief turned to anger, and their anger is directed squarely at the Peace Corps. They believe the agency should have been watching more closely.

And they're not alone.

"We believe that the Peace Corps severely failed their people, their volunteers, and knowing what I know, there is no way I would let my children volunteer for the Peace Corps unless there was some immediate changes and serious changes in the Peace Corps," said the General Accounting Office's Patrick Sullivan, who spent 23 years as a U.S. Secret Service special agent. "There's no way I'd put my children or recommend to anybody I know to put their loved ones in that situation." [Endquote]

Sullivan and John Cooney went to Bolivia on behalf of the GAO's Office of Special Investigations to review the Peace Corps' handling of the case.

The third excerpt is from the GAO report referenced in the previous excerpt, dated July 20, 2001. It reads as follows:

Both the Country Director and Deputy Country Director for the Peace Corps in Bolivia told us [the GAO] that the Associate Director was not keeping close enough contact with Mr. Poirier.

The report also states:

The Associate Director also said that he became so busy supervising the other volunteers that Mr. Poirier “dropped off my radar screen.” He said he made no further attempt to contact Mr. Poirier.

The GAO report is summarized in the following statement:

The Peace Corps failed to properly supervise Mr. Poirier and lost track of him.

The purpose of today’s hearing is to understand the Peace Corps’ efforts to develop and ensure compliance with basic safety and security policies for Peace Corps volunteers. Today’s hearing will provide members with necessary background information on the problems that have existed in recent years, and, as a case study, will examine the specific problems and management failures that led to and followed the disappearance of a volunteer in Bolivia, Walter J. Poirier.

The hearing will provide members with an opportunity to understand the policy and organizational changes made within the Peace Corps over the past two years toward the goal of improving safety and security of volunteers. The hearing will also provide members with the context for the additional legislation to be considered next week, the “Peace Corps Safety and Security Act of 2004”. That bill will create a more independent Inspector General, will establish the position of “Ombudsman” of the Peace Corps, and will statutorily create the Office of Safety and Security.

I look forward to today’s hearing, and I now recognize my friend and colleague, the distinguished ranking member from California, Tom Lantos.

Chairman HYDE. I look forward to today’s hearing, and I now am pleased to yield to my friend and colleague, the distinguished Ranking Member from California, Tom Lantos.

Mr. LANTOS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank you for calling this important hearing on the safety and security of Peace Corps Volunteers.

As these generous hearted volunteers continue to serve our country as ambassadors of hope and renewal to villages and towns across the globe, their well being must continue to be one of our highest priorities.

Mr. Chairman, in 1961, President John Kennedy established the Peace Corps to draw from an immense reservoir of men and women who were anxious to dedicate their time and toil to the cause of both peace and human progress.

Volunteers were expected to transcend the political divides of their day and work in true fellowship with local communities to support their development. In the process, this first generation of volunteers helped foster a greater understanding of American values and our culture abroad, as well as a better appreciation of other cultures and peoples by American citizens.

This month we celebrate the 43rd year of distinguished service by Peace Corps Volunteers in meeting these goals. Since the Peace Corps was established, more than 170,000 volunteers worked on behalf of humanity and our nation in 137 countries. They have successfully accomplished an enormous array of important projects, not the least of which is the aid the Peace Corps Volunteers lent to a young man named Alejandro Toledo.

As one of 16 children, Toledo was raised in the struggling port village of Chimbote, Peru, by a family of extremely modest means. At age 16, with the help of Peace Corps Volunteers, Toledo secured a 1-year scholarship to study economics at the University of San Francisco in my district.

He later continued his education at Stanford, worked for an international organization and eventually was elected President of Peru, the first of its indigenous people to lead that country. Last

year, President Toledo welcomed the Peace Corps back to Peru after a 27 year absence.

Many volunteers, like the ones who helped give the current President of Peru a running start in life, are from my home state of California. Of the 170,000 Peace Corps Volunteers since 1961, some 25,000 were from the State of California. Today, 15 of my constituents in my congressional district are serving as Peace Corps Volunteers in Latin America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

I ask unanimous consent, Mr. Chairman, that these 15 names, the countries where they serve and the dates of service be entered into the record, and I applaud all of them for their dedication and commitment.

Chairman HYDE. Without objection. So ordered.

[The information referred to follows:]



Sworn-in Volunteers In the District of CA_12

Representative: Tom Lantos

VOLUNTEER NAME	COUNTRY OF SERVICE	START OF SVC DATE	PROJECTED COS DATE
Basanez, Corrine N	COSTA RICA	11-Dec-2003	12-Dec-2005
Bhulyan, Qamrul I	MOROCCO	28-Nov-2003	01-Dec-2005
Chi, Sonya	EAST TIMOR	04-Jul-2003	01-Jul-2005
Choy, James P	MALI	24-Oct-2003	24-Oct-2005
Doan, Emily	UKRAINE	27-May-2003	27-May-2005
Gaasland, Joann	ARMENIA	20-Aug-2003	19-Jul-2005
Henley, Michael W	CAMEROON	22-Aug-2003	01-Jul-2005
Kahn, Jonathan M	ROMANIA	16-Aug-2002	30-Jun-2004
Lee, Angela H	PHILIPPINES	19-Mar-2002	20-Mar-2004
Lee, Ceilina	PANAMA	02-Aug-2002	04-Aug-2004
Lind, Andrew B	MOZAMBIQUE	14-Dec-2002	13-Dec-2004
McCarthy, Eileen L	GABON	13-Sep-2002	13-Sep-2004
Pena, Michelle J	BOLIVIA	08-Aug-2003	05-Aug-2005
Peterson, Doreen L	SAMOA	17-Dec-2003	18-Dec-2005
Rabover, Peter	KAZAKHSTAN	26-Aug-2003	25-Aug-2005
Simpson, Shona C	MALAWI	01-Aug-2002	31-Jul-2004

Total Volunteers: 16

Mr. LANTOS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, the horrific attacks of September 11, 2001, transformed how Americans view the world. The terrorist attacks also exposed many in our country to other people's perceptions or misperceptions about both our nation and our values.

I have stated on numerous previous occasions before this Committee my belief that we have been neglecting our many traditional public diplomacy efforts. In addition to repairing the damage to public diplomacy instruments at the State Department, I believe that the expansion of the Peace Corps, particularly in predominantly Muslim countries, can go a long way to helping the people of other nations achieve a better understanding of the United States.

Mr. Chairman, as President Kennedy anticipated, life in the Peace Corps is not easy. Volunteers often live in simple huts with no electricity or running water and the ever present possibility of unwelcome guests like cobras and scorpions.

They receive only a small stipend to meet their basic needs during their service abroad and a modest readjustment allowance after their duty is completed. Many times, volunteers are posted in communities where the nearest American is hours or days away.

Underlying these hardships is the belief that Americans and foreign people best understand one another when they work together on the same projects, share the same food and speak the same language.

Although life in the Peace Corps is not easy, it at least should be made safe. Mr. Chairman, I am profoundly disturbed by the most recent safety of the volunteers report in which incidents of reported minor sexual assaults against Peace Corps Volunteers around the world increased by 275 percent since 1995.

I am equally concerned about the plans of the agency to expand its programming in certain regions, most notably the inter American and Pacific region, where incidents of major sexual assaults were 63 percent higher than in Africa, Europe or Asia over the same 6-year period.

Although Latin America should be a top priority for receiving United States development assistance. We must make sure that we do not place more volunteers into high risk areas without first augmenting safety and security precautions for them.

I am also concerned, Mr. Chairman, about reports that the current leadership of the Office of Medical Services may be treating volunteers with questionable medical treatment and hamstringing the ability of in-country Peace Corps medical officers to provide the best possible standard of care to volunteers by slashing their budgets for vital medications and vaccines.

Mr. Chairman, the problems confronting us today around the world are towering, but they are neither unprecedented nor insurmountable. Through the dedication, sacrifice and self-reliance of Peace Corps Volunteers, our country is better able to meet these challenges.

I salute them for their service and pledge to ensure that they have the support they need to continue to accomplish the idealistic goals set before them over 4 decades ago.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman HYDE. Thank you, Mr. Lantos.

The Chair will entertain brief opening statements if there are any. Mr. Royce, do you have one? Mr. Bell?

Mr. BELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Today's hearing is of special significance. Congresswoman McCollum and I had the opportunity to visit with Peace Corps representatives on this very issue of security when we were in Jordan last fall.

Also, a member of my staff, Andy Oler, who is with us today, is a recently returned Peace Corps Volunteer who served in Burkina Faso, the third poorest country in the world, according to the 2003 United Nations human development report. He found the work so fulfilling that he extended for a 3rd year. Luckily, Andy served his time without incident and returned safely home. He followed safety recommendations and never felt in danger.

While Andy and most other volunteers are never harmed during their service, serious incidents do occur, as we have heard here today. As its first priority, Peace Corps must improve its safety and security policies, especially regarding volunteer monitoring, security training and data collection.

This being said, we must not hamper volunteers' ability to do their work by imposing heavy security restrictions. Frequently, American Embassy workers live behind locked gates to protect their safety. Peace Corps Volunteers could not be successful in such a restrictive security environment, I am sure all of you would agree.

A primary component of a Peace Corps Volunteer's work is cultural integration and understanding achieved through community immersion. Like everyone at this hearing, I am concerned for the volunteers who are in the field and for the people whose stories brought about this hearing, but how much can we increase Peace Corps security presence without compromising the volunteers' work and the agency's mission? That is the question I hope we can perhaps find some answers to here today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Chairman, if I could?

Chairman HYDE. Yes. Mr. Royce?

Mr. ROYCE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will make an opening statement.

I chair the Africa Subcommittee, and in January of last year I had a chance to spend time with several volunteers in Madagascar. I know the people of Madagascar appreciated their work. As a group, they were not up to full force there because, frankly, they had been pulled out of the country when political turmoil hit Madagascar during a very contentious political time when elections were scheduled in country.

These particular individuals had made the decision, knowing the dangers, to return to Madagascar after there was more stability. The job of the Peace Corps Volunteer is inherently dangerous. It always has been dangerous. Volunteers go to very difficult places in very remote locales.

In the post 9/11 world, unfortunately, the challenges of safety are only growing, but I do not think anyone is suggesting that we recoil. On the contrary, now more than ever, we should be doing more. I think the President recognizes this. I think that is the vi-

sion that he has set out to expand the Peace Corps, to double the size.

As Director Vasquez knows, personally, I would like to see the Peace Corps return to Sierra Leone. I understand our Ambassador to Freetown is pressing for their return. At the same time, we need to do all we can to promote security, and that is the purpose of this hearing.

It is my understanding that the Peace Corps is very up front about the risks with potential volunteers these days. This hearing will do more to advertise that risk to potential volunteers to notify of that risk. I understand that Director Vasquez, based upon the statements we have here, is going to state that safety is the number one priority of the Peace Corps. That is as it should be, and it is our responsibility as a Committee here with oversight to make certain that safety is the number one responsibility for the Peace Corps.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for holding this hearing.

Chairman HYDE. Thank you, Mr. Royce.

Ms. McCollum?

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Thank you. I would like to welcome the witnesses this morning.

Chairman Hyde, thank you for holding this hearing and giving the Committee an opportunity to ensure that the thousands of Americans who serve our country as Peace Corps Volunteers in distant lands are safe, healthy and successful in their service.

This means the Peace Corps staff in Washington, as well as country staff, have the resources and the tools they need to keep the volunteers safe. Peace Corps is truly a gift that the American people give to the world, and I am a big fan of your agency, Mr. Director.

I have visited Peace Corps staff and volunteers in South Africa, as well as recruiting staff and return volunteers back home in Minnesota on numerous occasions. We should all be proud of their commitment, service and sacrifice to our country and the communities they serve, often in very, very challenging circumstances. One of my staff is very proud that his 67-year-old grandmother recently arrived in Botswana to work on an HIV/AIDS project as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

Let me say once again that I strongly support the President's proposal to double the number of Peace Corps Volunteers, and I hope Congress will give Peace Corps the resources it needs to help meet the President's goal, and that also means the resources to keep volunteers safe and healthy.

Thank you.

Chairman HYDE. Thank you, Ms. McCollum.

The gentleman from New York, Mr. Houghton? No statement.

Mr. Weller? No statement.

Our first witness, Mr. Gaddi Vasquez, is a graduate of the University of Redlands, and he began his 22 year career in public service as a police officer in Orange, California.

He served as an appointee to former California Governors Pete Wilson and George Deukmejian and was appointed by former President George H. W. Bush to Federal commissions. He was

nominated by President George W. Bush to serve as Director of the Peace Corps, and we welcome Mr. Vasquez.

We are honored to have you appear before the Committee today. If you would proceed with a 5-minute, give or take, summary of your statement? Your full statement will be made a part of the record.

Then at the conclusion of your statement if you would make yourself comfortable, and we will have a second panel, and then after the second panel has testified if you would return to the table, we will then have questions. That way we can make sure everybody gets a chance to ask a question, if you do not mind.

Thank you. Please proceed with your statement.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE GADDI H. VASQUEZ,
DIRECTOR, THE PEACE CORPS**

Mr. VASQUEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be providing you today with—

Chairman HYDE. Is your microphone on?

Mr. VASQUEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be providing you today with an abbreviated version of my testimony, and I would like to submit the full written version with some additional material for the record.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am pleased to appear before your Committee today, and I appreciate the opportunity to present an overview of the current state of the Peace Corps and the many accomplishments which we, as an agency, have achieved since my arrival in February 2002.

Mr. Chairman, I also appreciate the ongoing support that you and this Committee have shown for the Peace Corps. While I understand that the purpose of today's hearing is to discuss the safety and security framework that has been designed to protect Peace Corps Volunteers, let me begin with some general comments about the Peace Corps and our goals.

Over 170,000 Americans have served as Peace Corps Volunteers since 1961. The volunteers have helped dispel misconceptions about Americans, assisted in fostering positive relationships with host country nationals, promoted sustainable development, and returned back home with messages about life overseas, the people they have served and the cultures they have experienced.

The core values of the Peace Corps and the grassroots work that President John F. Kennedy envisioned when he established the Peace Corps remain relevant, vital and strong.

It has been an exciting time at this agency as we continue to carry out President Bush's call to public service and his goal to increase the number of Peace Corps Volunteers serving in the field. However, since the amounts provided in the appropriations process for the past 2 years have fallen significantly short of those needed to meet the goal of doubling the number of volunteers, we are pursuing the strongest growth possible within the constraints of our resources while preserving the quality of the Peace Corps Volunteer experience and focusing on safety and security.

I am happy to report that in September 2003, the Peace Corps achieved a 28 year high with 7,533 volunteers working in the areas

of agriculture, business development, education, the environment, health and HIV/AIDS, and youth development.

I will now move to the important issue of volunteer safety. I will start by reaffirming that the safety and security of each volunteer is the agency's top priority. While the Peace Corps will never be able to issue an absolute guarantee, we remain committed to delivering and developing optimum conditions for a safe and fulfilling experience for every Peace Corps Volunteer.

Safety and security issues are fully integrated in all aspects of volunteer recruitment, training and service with an emphasis on volunteers taking personal responsibility at all times and integrating into communities. Information provided throughout the recruitment and application process includes key messages that being a volunteer involves risks, the volunteers can and are expected to adopt safe lifestyles, and that the Peace Corps has an effective safety support system in place.

Since taking office in February 2002, I am always mindful of the new security environment that September 11 placed on overseas organizations like the Peace Corps. Based on my personal experience as a former public safety official and aided by suggestions of others in the agency and recommendations from the GAO, the Peace Corps has taken the initiative to create and implement a number of safety enhancements.

In 2002, I approved a reorganization that created a new Office of Safety and Security and increased by 80 the number of full-time safety and security staff, of which 95 percent are deployed in the field. The staff includes a new associate director for safety and security, a chief compliance officer, a research psychologist, nine regionally based safety and security officers and 71 safety and security coordinators, one at each Peace Corps post.

It is also vital that volunteers know how to handle emergency situations, whether it is one volunteer in an accident or all volunteers in one country who need to be evacuated. As you may know, we recently suspended our program in Haiti due to the civil unrest. This has been the sixth successful evacuation during my tenure as director.

Whether it is civil unrest, war or the outbreak of SARS, the Peace Corps is diligent in monitoring the safety and security at each post and will not hesitate to take action should the need arise to move our volunteers out of harm's way.

While establishing new training procedures, expanding staff resources and ensuring compliance are important, the ultimate evaluation should be measured by results. During the past 2 years, the Peace Corps has experienced a significant drop in volunteer deaths, major sexual assaults and minor assaults. For example, the rate of serious sexual assault events is down $\frac{1}{3}$ since 1997.

However, in the unfortunate situation when a violent crime against a volunteer does occur, the Peace Corps has mechanisms in place to assist the volunteer in every way possible.

Last October, I issued a new Peace Corps protocol on violent crimes against volunteers which helped clarify the existing duties of the Inspector General when a volunteer is the victim of a crime. It is important to note that the Peace Corps maintains a healthy working relationship with the Office of the Inspector General. We

take that report very seriously in the field and at headquarters, and our chief compliance officer checks to ensure that we appropriately follow up on their recommendations.

As you may know, the Peace Corps is a unique Federal agency in that most employees are limited to serving the agency for 5 years. Recently, Congress gave the Peace Corps authority to exempt certain positions associated with safety and security from the 5-year rule. I have designated our first group of 23 exempt positions of which 19 are in our newly reorganized Office of Safety and Security.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, our agency has accomplished a great deal over the past 24 months in both safety and security and the growth of our programs. I am grateful to you and Members of the Committee for your continued support of the Peace Corps mission.

I believe that the Peace Corps is well positioned to safely, and I emphasize safely, achieve expansion and build upon the successes of the past 43 years.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for this opportunity.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Vasquez follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE GADDI H. VASQUEZ, DIRECTOR, THE
PEACE CORPS

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to appear before your Committee today. I appreciate the opportunity to present an overview of the current state of the Peace Corps and the many accomplishments, which we, as an agency, have achieved since my arrival in February 2002. Mr. Chairman, I also appreciate the on-going support that you and many Members of this Committee have shown for the Peace Corps, and I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to encourage Members of the Committee to visit Peace Corps Volunteers should you travel to any of the 71 countries in which we operate. Seeing the Volunteers firsthand can give you a heightened appreciation for the remarkable service our American men and women perform overseas. Whether teaching schoolchildren in Kazakhstan how to use the Internet, or assisting a community in Namibia to build a solar-powered oven, seeing the Volunteers in action makes you proud of these Americans who are serving their country in nations around the world. If you are traveling to a country in which the Peace Corps has a program, please let us know and we will make every effort to connect you with a Volunteer. After meeting them, I know you will share in our enthusiasm to ensure the Peace Corps continues as a world-class organization, promoting world peace and friendship abroad.

While I understand the purpose of today's hearing is to discuss the safety and security framework that has been designed to protect Peace Corps Volunteers, let me begin with some general comments about the Peace Corps and our goals. Earlier this month, we celebrated the Peace Corps' 43rd anniversary. We have learned valuable lessons over the last 43 years. Over 170,000 Americans have served as Peace Corps Volunteers. The Volunteers have helped dispel misconceptions about Americans, assisted in fostering positive relationships with host country nationals, promoted sustainable development, and returned back home with messages about life overseas, the people they have served, and the cultures they have experienced. The core values of the Peace Corps and the grassroots work that President John F. Kennedy envisioned when he signed the Executive Order establishing the Peace Corps on March 1, 1961, remain relevant, vital, and strong.

These are the Peace Corps goals that we continue to promote:

- to help the people of interested countries and areas in meeting their need for trained men and women;
- to help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served; and
- to bring that information back home to help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

This past year has brought many accomplishments. It has been an exciting time at the agency as we continue to carry out President Bush's call to public service and his goal to increase the number of Peace Corps Volunteers serving in the field. Mr. Chairman, the Peace Corps is pleased to be on a pathway for growth. However, since the amounts provided in the appropriations process for the past two years have fallen significantly short of that needed to meet the goal of doubling the number of Volunteers, we are pursuing the strongest growth possible within the constraints of our resources.

Yet, I am happy to report that in September 2003, the Peace Corps achieved a 28-year high with 7,533 Volunteers working in 71 countries in the areas of agriculture, business development, education, the environment, health and HIV/AIDS education and prevention, and youth development.

By knowing local cultures and communicating in local languages, the Peace Corps continues to be actively engaged in activities addressing HIV/AIDS, at the grass-roots level, providing over two million service hours a year. Fighting the ravages of this disease is paramount to the survival of people across the globe, and important to this agency. All Volunteers who serve in our 26 African nations—regardless of their program sector—are trained to provide HIV/AIDS prevention and education. In fiscal year 2003, for example, we re-entered the countries of Botswana and Swaziland exclusively to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic. We are also collaborating with the Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator to continue our work in this arena and seeking to assist in meeting the President's challenge to provide treatment to 2 million HIV-infected people; prevent 7 million new infections; and, offer care to 10 million people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, including orphans and vulnerable children.

In addition, Peace Corps Volunteers remain committed to serving in countries with predominantly Muslim populations. This has been true since the Peace Corps' inception in 1961. Currently, almost 20 percent of our Volunteers are serving in nations with predominately Muslim populations in West and North Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and Central Asia. Three out of four of our new country entries in 2003 were in predominately Muslim countries—Albania, Azerbaijan, and Chad—bringing our total program involvement from 14 nations in 2002 to 17 in 2004. The Peace Corps' mission in these regions matches our efforts worldwide and continues to be important. Host communities are exposed to positive and personal images of Americans, and returning Volunteers share their new understanding of these different cultures with friends and family in the United States.

NEW INITIATIVES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Last fall, we launched a new national recruiting campaign to attract new Volunteers and increase diversity. The campaign theme—"Life is calling. How far will you go?"—was designed to touch the hearts, enlighten the minds, and inspire the spirits of the next wave of Peace Corps Volunteers. It included new recruiting materials, a re-designed website, updated recruitment videos, and new public service announcements. The response has been tremendous. Over the past year, Volunteer applications have increased by nearly 12 percent and, since the launch of the re-designed website, online inquiries are up 44 percent. Applications now completed online have jumped to 81 percent of all applications submitted; this is an increase from 42 percent in 2001. Applications from Latinos, African-Americans, Native Americans, and Asian-Americans are also up by 10 percent. The bottom line is that Americans want to serve and there are developing countries that want and need not only the skills of our citizens, but also want to build relationships that help further world peace and friendship.

In February of this year, the Peace Corps and the American Association of Community Colleges unveiled a new, groundbreaking recruitment initiative that will increase awareness of opportunities for specially trained Americans to share their skills internationally. It will allow those with the experience and occupational and technical skills—such as licensed nurses and trained information technology experts—to respond to the critical needs of countries where Peace Corps Volunteers serve. The rollout was launched in four different regions of the United States—Washington D.C., Colorado, California, and Minnesota—and has been met with an overwhelming positive response. In fact, many community colleges nationwide are expanding their international programs and view Peace Corps service as a tremendous opportunity to enhance their graduates' professional careers.

On November 12, 2003, I signed an historic agreement that will lead to Peace Corps Volunteers serving in Mexico for the first time. This innovative partnership will allow Volunteers to join along side the National Council on Science and Technology (CONACYT) of Mexico and work in the areas of information technology,

small business development, and science and technology. The Peace Corps country director has been selected and the first group of 15 to 20 Volunteers will arrive in Mexico this fall.

TRAVEL TO PEACE CORPS COUNTRIES

Over the past year, I have also had the privilege to travel to 12 different Peace Corps countries from Central America, to Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Pacific. During each visit, I met with Volunteers, host government officials, and representatives of our U.S. missions abroad. The support and enthusiasm I have received from each of these groups remains very high. In Fiji, for example, I was approached by a man in his mid-thirties, asking if I was the Peace Corps Director. The man stated that he had recognized me from the news the night before and was very excited that Peace Corps had returned to Fiji. He went on to explain that as a young boy he was taught by Peace Corps Volunteers and has never forgotten them. This type of story is repeated to me over and over throughout my travels. The Peace Corps continues to leave a lasting legacy across the globe, which I experience each time I am abroad.

While the world today is very different from 1961 when Peace Corps began, and even more so since September 11th—the American spirit of sharing with others remains a fundamental part of our democratic society.

Just last week, I returned from Guatemala where, on behalf of the Peace Corps, I received the Orden del Quetzal from Guatemalan President Oscar Berger Perdomo. President Berger recognized the distinguished service that Peace Corps Volunteers have given to the nation of Guatemala over the past 40 years. The award acknowledged the work of our former and current Volunteers in strengthening the friendship, harmony, and good will between our two countries. The presentation reminded those in attendance of the remarkable contribution that close to 4,500 Volunteers have given to the people of Guatemala through their hard work and enthusiasm. I was truly honored to receive this award, on behalf of the Peace Corps, from the Guatemalan government.

VOLUNTEER SAFETY AND SECURITY: OUR OVERARCHING PRIORITY

I will now move to the important issue of Volunteer safety. I will start by reaffirming that the safety and security of each Volunteer is the agency's top priority. All 16 Peace Corps directors, beginning with Sargent Shriver, the agency's first director, have placed a high priority on Volunteer safety and security. While the Peace Corps will never be able to issue an absolute guarantee, we remain committed to developing optimum conditions for a safe and fulfilling experience for every Peace Corps Volunteer.

Safety and security issues are fully integrated in all aspects of Volunteer recruitment, training, and service, with an emphasis on Volunteers taking personal responsibility at all times and assimilating into communities. Information provided throughout the recruitment and application process—to recruiters, on the recruitment website, in printed application materials, informational booklets and educational videos, during the two days of staging, and the 10 to 12 weeks of in-country pre-service training—all includes the key messages that being a Volunteer involves risk, that Volunteers can and are expected to adopt safe lifestyles, and that the Peace Corps has an effective safety support system in place.

Since taking office in February 2002, I have made the safety and security of Volunteers my number one priority, and I am always mindful of the new security environment that September 11th placed on overseas organizations like the Peace Corps.

Based on my personal experience as a former public safety official, and aided by suggestions of others in the agency, the recommendations and findings from the General Accounting Office's July 2002 report on Volunteer safety, and Volunteers in the field, the Peace Corps has taken the initiative to create and implement a number of safety enhancements. In 2002, I approved a reorganization that created a new Office of Safety and Security and increased by 80 people the number of full-time safety and security staff, ninety-five percent of which are deployed overseas.

This staff, which includes a new associate director of safety and security, a chief compliance officer, a research psychologist, nine regionally-based safety and security officers, and a safety and security desk officer for each Peace Corps region, was restructured to better communicate, supervise, monitor and help set safety and security policy. In addition, all 71 Peace Corps posts have established a safety and security coordinator in country to oversee Volunteer safety issues in the field.

Other new initiatives in safety and security include:

- The creation of new standard operating procedures and a new standard template for posts in developing their Emergency Action Plans;
- The implementation and compliance of new procedures for Volunteer/Trainee Safety and Security (Manual Section 270) to measure and monitor posts' compliance with important safety and security requirements;
- The addition of the equivalent of one full day of safety and security training during a two-day pre-departure orientation (staging) for new trainees;
- The establishment of regular safety and security staff training on a two-year cycle;
- An enhancement of the safety and security information message that a potential applicant receives from his or her first contact with Peace Corps—during recruitment and throughout the application process; and
- The availability of safety and security information on the Peace Corps' website.

The new staff, the new compliance tools, the additional documentation, and the restructured Office of Safety and Security have all been designed to bring greater standardization and accountability to the safety and security function.

It is important to note that the Peace Corps' core safety and security philosophy is one of Volunteer acceptance and integration into the local community. This necessitates the thoughtful design of viable projects, the adaptation of Volunteers into their new sites and cultures, and the development of the Volunteers network of support. A safe and secure Volunteer is one who is working in the community on a well-designed project. In all programming, the Peace Corps works to ensure Volunteers have clearly defined job assignments. The technical training component of pre-service training prepares Volunteers with the essential competencies to successfully perform their work in their program sector. Eighty percent of pre-service training involves some community based training in order to simulate real-life experiences in the workplace, home, and community. Solid training and jobs enable Volunteers to become more quickly involved in their work, build a support network that includes their new colleagues, and produce measurable project outcomes. These factors lead to higher rates of Volunteer job satisfaction, which is important to Volunteer safety.

While the pre-service training contains many important technical components, language, cultural nuances, and safety and security training are key factors in preparing a Volunteer for integration into the host community and laying the groundwork for a safe and fulfilling Volunteer experience. High quality, practical cross-cultural training is also a cornerstone of Volunteer training. At the conclusion of pre-service training, "trainees" must pass a series of core competencies before being sworn in as full-fledged Peace Corps Volunteers. These core competencies require trainees to demonstrate an understanding of issues such as personal safety strategies, dealing with unwanted attention, identifying risk factors and strategies for avoiding risk, and the importance of incident reporting. They must also be able to communicate basic messages in the local language, exhibit an understanding of Peace Corps policies, as well as know their roles and responsibilities in the Emergency Action Plan.

It is vital that Volunteers know how to handle emergency situations, whether it is one Volunteer in an accident or all Volunteers in one country who need to be evacuated. As you may know, we recently suspended our program in Haiti, due to the civil unrest, and brought our 76 Volunteers home. This has been the sixth successful evacuation during my tenure as Director—the 10th since the fall of 2001—impacting 908 Volunteers. Whether it is civil unrest, war, or the outbreak of SARS, the Peace Corps is diligent in monitoring the safety and security at each post and will not hesitate to take action should the need arise to move our Volunteers out of harm's way.

In the activation of an Emergency Action Plan, as well as in more isolated emergencies—such as notification of a serious illness of a family member at home—the Peace Corps needs to be able to reach Volunteers at their sites. The Peace Corps makes use of all available and appropriate technology to communicate with Volunteers. As technology evolves, so does the Volunteers' use of technology. In some countries, where cell phones are readily available, reliable, and widely used, almost all Peace Corps Volunteers will have one. For example, almost 100 percent of the Volunteers in South Africa have cell phones. In others, where cell phone coverage is non-existent or sporadic at best, Volunteers make use of the best parts of the communications infrastructure of that country. For instance, in the South Pacific Islands, cell phone systems are not available. Instead, solar-powered landlines are available to be used by Volunteers with Iridium phones as back up with the Volunteer Leaders. Overall, posts use a combination of cell phones, landlines, solar-pow-

ered landlines, email, beepers, radios, and message relay systems to reach Volunteers on a regular basis and in emergency situations. Furthermore, when Peace Corps Volunteers are placed in communities around the world, they have a circle of support around them that includes local host country nationals as well as Peace Corps staff. As would be the case here in the United States, if a person were in distress, friends, neighbors, colleagues, host country counterparts, and local police are available to assist with the situation and to send and receive emergency messages.

The Peace Corps uses four key elements in establishing and maintaining its safety and security framework for Volunteers and staff: research, planning, training, and compliance. Safety and security information is tracked and analyzed on an ongoing basis. The data analysis, conducted now by our new safety and security research psychologist, is used to enhance existing policies or develop new policies and procedures, as needed. Our research psychologist also periodically corroborates statistical data on crimes against Volunteers with the Department of State's Crime Division, the only division solely dedicated as an official repository of crime statistics.

After careful analysis and planning, changes are being integrated throughout the agency. The training of Volunteers includes the most up-to-date safety and security information available. Lastly, compliance is essential to ensure that safety and security measures are adhered to and remain a top priority over the course of time. Each of these components helps create a framework to safeguard the well being of Volunteers and staff, enabling them to carry out the Peace Corps' mission.

STATISTICAL RESULTS

While establishing new training procedures, expanding staff resources and insuring compliance are important; the ultimate evaluation should be measured by results. During the past two years, the Peace Corps has experienced a significant drop in Volunteer deaths, major sexual assaults, and minor assaults. The rate of serious sexual assault events is down one-third since 1997. Additional statistical data shows:

- In 2002, Peace Corps experienced a 27 percent decline in the rate of major sexual assault events from 2001;[T1]
- In 2002, we experienced a 13 percent decrease in the rate of rape events from 2001;
- Since 1997, we have had a 36 percent decrease in the rate of rape events; and,
- The rate of major physical assault events, with minor fluctuations, has remained steady over the last 6 years.

In addition to the statistical data, the most effective tool for gauging success is to ask Volunteers. Every two years, the Peace Corps conducts a global survey to measure the levels of Volunteer satisfaction with programming, safety, medical, and other key indicators. In the most recent global volunteer survey, which had a 68 percent response rate (itself a high response rate):

- 97 percent of the respondents replied that they felt "very safe" to "adequately safe" where they live;
- 99 percent of the respondents felt "very safe" to "adequately safe" where they work;
- 84 percent of the volunteers felt "very safe" to "adequately safe" when they traveled; and,
- 89 percent—overwhelmingly responded in the affirmative when asked if they would make the same decision to join the Peace Corps.

NEW PROTOCOL ON VIOLENT CRIMES AGAINST VOLUNTEERS

Notwithstanding that Volunteers largely feel safe where they are living and working, safety incidents do occur. One assault against a Volunteer is one too many. We take each incident very seriously and mobilize all of our resources to assist Volunteers in need. Whether the crime is that of theft of a Volunteer's property or a major sexual assault, the Peace Corps has trained, professional, caring staff in place to immediately respond and bring appropriate medical attention, counseling, and law enforcement to aid the Volunteer. In some situations, Volunteers are medically evacuated to the United States to receive focused care and treatment.

As I have explained, the Office of Safety and Security takes extensive measures to ensure that the agency is effectively working to *prevent* crimes against Volunteers. In addition to the extensive training, this office also collects data to analyze

crime trends to help inform policy and prevent future incidents. For instance, the data indicates that Volunteers are most at risk for a major physical assault on a Saturday or Sunday between the hours of 7:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m. in an urban, public area. Such risk factors are repeatedly emphasized to Volunteers during training so they can minimize their risk of becoming a victim. Volunteers are instructed on how to take personal responsibility to avoid risky situations and modify their behavior to protect themselves.

However, in the unfortunate situation when a violent crime against a Volunteer does occur, the Peace Corps has mechanisms in place to assist the Volunteer in every way possible. I have mentioned medical care and counseling. Allow me to turn to the issue of investigation and prosecution and the role of the Peace Corps Office of the Inspector General.

Last October, I issued a new Peace Corps "Protocol on Violent Crimes Against Volunteers," which helped clarify the existing duties of the Inspector General when a Volunteer is a victim of a violent crime. Specifically, the Inspector General has a coordinating role and is charged with reviewing the investigation efforts of local officials, conducting appropriate follow-up actions to support an investigation, and assisting in the prosecution. As appropriate, the Office of the Inspector General escorts the Volunteer or former Volunteer back for host-nation investigative and prosecutorial proceedings.

With the restructuring of the new Office of Safety and Security, and to benefit the service to Volunteers and this agency, I was pleased to comply with the Office of the Inspector General's request to more formally clarify to the agency the responsibilities of the Office of Inspector General in following up on violent crimes against Volunteers. While this protocol was simply a clarification of existing duties, I can also report that I have consistently increased the Office of Inspector General's budget, which has risen by 30 percent since 2002.

The Peace Corps maintains a healthy working relationship with the Office of the Inspector General, which operates as an independent entity under the Inspector General Act, not the Peace Corps Act. As an independent office that audits our financial functions, evaluates the management and program operations, and investigates allegations of criminal activity, the Office of the Inspector General plays an important oversight role in evaluating and identifying areas and processes in the agency that require immediate attention as well as long-term improvement. We take their reports very seriously in the field and at Headquarters, and our Chief Compliance Officer checks to ensure that we appropriately follow up on their recommendations. For example, the Inspector General brought it to my attention that many problems existed with Volunteer hostels, which often draw Volunteers away from their sites and away from making lasting relationships with members of their community. After a thorough assessment, our Peace Corps manual was revised prohibiting the Peace Corps from providing, sanctioning, or condoning the use of hostels unless previously approved by the Director. This decision was not met favorably by many Volunteers, yet based on the Inspector General's report, was in the best interest of the agency. I look forward to continuing our balanced working relationship that values both the Office of the Inspector General's independence and recommendations.

PROPOSED LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

I understand this Committee intends to consider legislation in the near future that will impact the Peace Corps. One of the major strengths of the Peace Corps Act is that it is a broad authorization, which has over the years, given ample opportunity for the agency to maintain its independence and its effectiveness. Congress set forth broad objectives, and let the Executive Branch, in consultation with the host government or its peoples and Congress^[T2], establish programs that meet the individual needs of each country. Few agencies have been so successfully and efficiently managed over such a long period. To maintain our effectiveness in an era of continued growth and opportunity requires that management has the flexibility to make decisions that best serve the agency and, most importantly, the Volunteers. We do not believe that it is in the best interest of this agency to pursue any of the legislative changes that we understand the committee plans to consider.

As noted above, the Peace Corps currently has a positive and independent working relationship with the Office of Inspector General, as a Designated Federal Entity under the Inspector General Act of 1978. The budget for the office has consistently increased over the last three years, with a current budget of \$2.55 million in fiscal year 2004 supporting 17 positions (the total budget for the agency is \$308 million). Given the size of our agency and funding level, we find this arrangement appropriate and in line with similar agencies of our size and stature. Other agencies

where the Inspector General is appointed by the head of an agency include AM-TRAK, the Federal Reserve, EEOC, and SEC. The President appoints Inspector Generals at large departments and agencies, such as DOD, Commerce Department, Department of Education, HHS, and HUD.

Secondly, we find it unnecessary to permanently institute an Office of the Ombudsman. This new statutory requirement would be duplicative on many levels, diluting the authority already granted to the Office of the Inspector General. Given the broad parameters that we understand the legislation would create for the Ombudsman, it could actually conflict with the Inspector General's existing jurisdictional authority and could artificially interrupt standard review procedures. In addition, the agency is in the process of considering establishing an internal liaison to facilitate post-medical services issues on behalf of returning Volunteers—an item I will address further at the close of my remarks. Again, while the idea may have merit, we do not see the creation of such an office as an appropriate use of our agency's funds.

IMPACT OF THE 5-YEAR RULE

As you may know, the Peace Corps is a unique federal agency in that most employees are limited to serving the agency for five years, though we are permitted to extend the service of a limited number of employees past the five-year mark. This creates a dynamic, energetic atmosphere in which Peace Corps staff works hard to have a positive impact on the agency during their five-year tenure. Recently, Congress gave the Peace Corps authority to exempt certain positions associated with safety and security from the five-year rule. Since this is a departure from our historical employment laws and regulation, I carefully reviewed the positions and formally designated our first group of 23 exempt positions on October 29, 2003. Nineteen of these positions are in our newly re-organized Office of Safety and Security, which is the Peace Corps office primarily responsible for Volunteer safety and security. One Safety and Security Desk Officer position in each of the regional directorates has been designated, and the position of Director of Quality Improvement in the Office of Medical Services has also been exempted. We believe that these 23 positions are the most clear-cut and readily justifiable applications of the new authority, as they most directly and obviously impact Volunteer safety. Additionally, the 71 safety and security coordinator positions at post are not subject to the five-year rule limitation.

While these were the most obvious designations, I have ordered that an independent, outside expert be hired to review Peace Corps operations and make recommendations on what additional, second-tier safety-related positions should be taken out from under the five-year rule. The review will specifically include the Office of Inspector General. At the conclusion of the expert consultant's review, I will make decisions about any other appropriate exemptions for personnel related to safety and security. Because of these on-going activities to implement the five-year rule exemption appropriately, we also do not see the necessity of further legislation in this regard, which the Committee may soon contemplate. The first 23 positions, which directly impact Volunteer safety and security, are now exempt and we expect to exempt a number of second-tier positions as we proceed through this process.

VOLUNTEER CARE

Lastly, let me take a moment to address this issue and reiterate a point that is true agency-wide: the Volunteer is at the heart of all Peace Corps programs and policies. These are Americans who commit to serving 27 months abroad with the hope of making a contribution and a connection to people they do not know and often learning a language that they do not speak. Volunteers exhibit great commitment, optimism, and a "can-do" attitude as they work toward sustainable development at the grassroots level in emerging countries. While the circumstances in which they work may be challenging, the personal and professional rewards can be immeasurable. As an agency, we commit to providing the best experience possible to our Volunteers from their first contact with Peace Corps as an applicant to their years as a returned Peace Corps Volunteer. The Volunteers are our heart and soul and everything this agency does revolves around them.

Thus, we constantly strive to provide support to our Volunteers and continually seek ways to improve. During a Peace Corps Volunteer's service in the field, the Office of Special Services plays an essential role in our Volunteer support system. For instance, the Office of Special Services coordinates the after-hours duty system, which provides 24 hours a day, seven days a week coverage for all Volunteers and their families. Parents may call this office, at any time, if they need to advise their Volunteer of a critical illness or death of a family member. The Office of Special

Services immediately informs the Country Director so that the information is passed on to the Volunteer as soon as possible, and arrangements can be made for special emergency leave if appropriate. The Office of Special Services also serves as a key link with families in the intense time of a country evacuation or the tragic event of the death of a Volunteer. This office is also a key resource for staff and volunteers in assisting with mental health and behavioral issues. In all of these situations, the trained professionals who work in the Office of Special Services strive to provide top-quality care, timely information, and supportive service to Peace Corps Volunteers and their families. Here is just a sample of one family's experience. "When Peace Corps called us about Beth's accident in Zambia and her life-flight to Pretoria, my husband, Gerry, immediately flew to South Africa to be with our daughter . . . Through this terrible time, I was in close telephone contact with a Peace Corps counselor in Washington, D.C. When Gerry arrived, he was met and supported throughout by a Peace Corps medical officer . . . the Peace Corps was our advocate in every way possible. They treated us as though we were part of their own family."

While Volunteers may or may not have circumstances that necessitate the involvement of the Office of Special Services during their tenure, all Peace Corps Volunteers go through a readjustment process upon completion of their service as a Peace Corps Volunteer. For some, the transition back to life in the United States is a return to familiarity—the filling out of paperwork and taking care of any needed medical follow-up. For others, however, moving from two years of medical care by the Peace Corps, helping with everything from a toothache to a serious medical issue, can present a more significant challenge.

The Post Service Unit in our Office of Medical Services facilitates post-service medical benefits to returned Peace Corps Volunteers with service-related medical conditions as their care is transferred to the U.S. Department of Labor. Volunteers are considered Federal employees for the purpose of health benefits provided through the Federal Employees' Compensation Act (FECA) program administered by the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs at the Department of Labor. The FECA program provides post-service medical and compensation benefits for conditions exacerbated, accelerated, or precipitated by service in the Peace Corps.

While Peace Corps staff remains vigilant in trying to ensure that claims on behalf of returned Peace Corps Volunteers are processed by the Department of Labor in a timely manner, this is an area where there is room for improvement. Progress in this area both reward former Volunteers that have already served their country and enhance the attractiveness of the Peace Corps Volunteer program to future Volunteers. As we strive to provide our Volunteers with the best service possible, we welcome positive steps—such as a post-service liaison—which would result in reducing delays experienced by former Volunteers as they seek resolution of their healthcare claims.

Additionally, when a Volunteer completes his or her service, the Volunteer has the opportunity to purchase private health insurance through CorpsCare (a program similar to the COBRA health insurance plan). Peace Corps pays the first premium covering the first 31 days and then the individual can continue to purchase the policy for up to 18 months. The policy is designed to cover any medical issues not related to a Volunteer's service. After identifying a gap during which many Volunteers who purchased CorpsCare were experiencing a lag time as they awaited a decision on their FECA claim, Peace Corps renegotiated the CorpsCare contract to provide former Volunteers with greater continuity of coverage. The new CorpsCare contract went into effect on March 1, 2004, and we are especially pleased with this new arrangement, which should be a great improvement in providing care for returned Peace Corps Volunteers.

As we seek to further Peace Corps' three goals, the Volunteer is always the central focus. We are continually striving to improve the agency and ensure that our Peace Corps Volunteers have meaningful, productive, and life-changing experiences as they serve throughout the world. Over 170,000 Americans have served in the Peace Corps, and we look forward to providing excellent care to the people of the United States who may serve, are serving, or have returned from service. The Peace Corps will not rest on our achievements and accomplishments. We will build on the successes and learn from events as they occur. Not long ago, I read a message from the parent of a volunteer who was grateful for the quality of care that was rendered by Peace Corps staff overseas and here in the United States. The parent wrote, "As a United States citizen, I am very proud of the Peace Corps; it is a superb organization worthy of every citizen's support."

CONCLUSION

The safety of the Volunteer is the number one priority of the Peace Corps, and remains the primary focus of many of the research, planning, training, and compliance components of the agency. As noted above, our agency has accomplished a great deal over the past 22 months—in both safety and security and the growth of our programs. Our FY 2005 budget request of \$401 million will support this continued growth and maintain the infrastructure we presently have in place.

In conclusion, I am grateful to you and members of the Committee for your continued support of the Peace Corps mission. September 11th is a grim reminder that the work of past, present, and future Volunteers is more critical than ever. I believe that the Peace Corps is well positioned to safely achieve expansion and build upon the successes of the past 43 years.

Chairman HYDE. Thank you, Director Vasquez. If you do not remind retiring to the dugout, we will proceed with the second panel, and then we will entertain questions.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Yes, sir.

Chairman HYDE. I would like to welcome Mr. Walter Poirier of Lowell, Massachusetts. Mr. Poirier's son, Walter J. Poirier, served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Bolivia until his disappearance after January 2001. He is joined in the audience by Mrs. Sheila Poirier, and we thank both of you for joining us today.

Next, Mr. Jeff Bruce is the Editor of the *Dayton Daily News*. Mr. Bruce holds a Bachelor's Degree from St. Edwards University in Austin, Texas, and we thank you, Mr. Bruce.

Mr. Jess Ford is Director for International Affairs and Trade at the General Accounting Office where he has worked since 1973. Mr. Ford has a Master's Degree in International Relations from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and we welcome you, Mr. Ford.

Mr. Kevin Quigley holds degrees from Georgetown University, Columbia University, the University College of Dublin and Swarthmore College. Mr. Quigley served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Thailand and is now the President of the National Peace Corps Association, a membership organization for 200,000 former Peace Corps staff and volunteers. We welcome you, Mr. Quigley.

Mr. Charles Smith is an alumnus of Oberlin College, receiving an M.A. from Washington University and a J.D. from Boston University. He served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Ethiopia and has served as Inspector General of the Peace Corps since 1998. Welcome, Mr. Smith.

We are honored to have all of you appear before the Committee today, and if we would proceed with a 5-minute summary. Your full statement will be made a part of the record, and we will then be rejoined by Mr. Vasquez, Director Vasquez, and we will then ask questions of the witnesses.

Thank you for being here. Mr. Poirier, 5 minutes if possible, and your full statement will be made a part of the record.

STATEMENT OF WALTER R. POIRIER

Mr. POIRIER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, Committee Members.

The Poirier family is extremely grateful for the ability to speak to this Committee regarding the disappearance of our son 3 years ago in Bolivia. In those 3 years, we have been through a gamut of emotions, and we hope no family will have to endure this again.

To start, we believe that if we had not tried to contact our son on March 4, 2001, after not hearing from him for over a month, the Peace Corps would not have known he was missing for at least another week or 2.

Lack of at least a weekly report mandate, coupled with an influx of new PCVs, the Bolivia 26, seemed to overburden the management of Bolivia Peace Corps. Trying to place too many volunteers in an effort to boost enrollment numbers while not having enough qualified management to deal with the situation caused the Peace Corps to lose contact with our son.

We believe that our son actually disappeared sometime after January 31, 2001, as no one can confirm having seen him. No Peace Corps official can confirm seeing him after that week. Whatever happened to him, he was declared officially missing by the Peace Corps on March 6, 2001.

When I spoke to the Bolivian country director I asked what safety protocols were in place for volunteers whose assignments were in remote areas such as my son and what provisions were made to enable them to communicate with Peace Corps Bolivia headquarters. She replied that there was a radio telephone within two or three kilometers of my son's site on the Zong Valley. The radio telephone was actually several miles away.

When asked why these young people had no cell phones, satellite phones or GPS devices, her response was we have been doing it this way for 40 years. This attitude that the Peace Corps has no need for change is a recurring theme in Peace Corps liturgy.

We believe that the Peace Corps response was too little too late. There are numerous reasons. The aforementioned lack of oversight is one, but, more importantly, there was a prevailing attitude of acceptance within Peace Corps management that many volunteers take off from their assignments without leave.

One of the reasons for the phenomena of going AWOL may be a lack of specific goals and work assignments and lack of proper experience of the volunteer to match the work assignment. This may result in a high rate of early separation.

When young college graduates who have just devoted 4 long years in reaching a goal are placed in an environment where there is no tangible success to be achieved, boredom sets in. This would probably be the reason for the leaves.

This current generation, my son included, have been raised with visual and tactile stimulation. They need positive feedback and reinforcement so that they feel what they are doing is having positive results.

The push to increase the number of PCVs will only increase if the number of generalists decreases. We believe that the Bolivian Peace Corps management team felt that our son had taken one of those leaves as they only sent out his immediate supervisor to find him at first.

We are not sure, but we believe that the Embassy and the Bolivian national police were not notified until several days after we alerted the Peace Corps. To compound the matter, the supervisor concocted a lie, stating that our son had a meeting with his counterpart in early March 2002 at La Paz government that he missed. This assistant country director said he lied to protect himself after

being confronted by the FBI. We believe that the constant theme of protecting Peace Corps' image was a factor.

We believe that the lack of supervision, lack of meaningful assignment and lack of a proper place to live all contributed to the loss of our son.

From the beginning, we have found Peace Corps to be more concerned with its image and protecting the aura and prestige of the Peace Corps than any other issue. In the first meeting with personnel from Peace Corps Washington on March 26, they stated that the search for my son had been reinvigorated. This is 20 days after he was first declared missing.

Then the regional director, Ms. Minutillo, and a psychologist, Ms. Gutmann, raised questions about our son's sense of responsibility and his work ethic. Our son had first been declared missing on March 6, and now we were being told the search was reinvigorated.

The second visit came on April 6, 2001. At this time, Mr. Boswell, of the PC's Inspector General's Office, accompanied Mrs. Gutmann, along with a person who was to do a video for Bolivian TV.

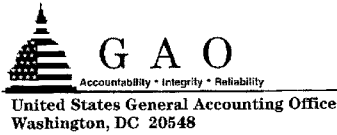
Mr. Boswell said he was the lead investigator for my son's case and had just returned from Bolivia. He intimated that it was not uncommon for PC volunteers to form relationships with the locals in their host countries and hinted that they thought this may be my son's case. That idea was also hinted at by the acting Peace Corps director at that time.

On both occasions, there was a concern that we would say or do something that would impugn the Peace Corps' image. This became more apparent each time we tried to bring national attention to Walter's disappearance. The most glaring example occurred when we appeared on the Today Show in April 2001 as there was a press release already being circulated from Peace Corps as we were appearing.

Further examples of this constant spin is the outraged response to the two reports done by the GAO, especially the one that focused on our son, which is GAO Report 01-970R dated July 20, 2001. Respectfully, Mr. Chairman, I request that this report be placed in the record.

Chairman HYDE. Without objection. So ordered.

[The information referred to follows:]



July 20, 2001

The Honorable Martin T. Meehan
House of Representatives

Subject: The Peace Corps Failed to Properly Supervise Missing Volunteer and Lost Track of Him

Dear Mr. Meehan:

This letter responds to your May 11, 2001, request for information surrounding the disappearance of Walter J. Poirier, a Peace Corps volunteer in Bolivia, who reportedly was last seen on or about February 22, 2001, in La Paz, the capital of Bolivia. Specifically, you requested that we conduct an investigation to determine (1) whether the Peace Corps failed to properly supervise Mr. Poirier's activities and (2) the actions taken by the Peace Corps and the U.S. Embassy in Bolivia when informed that Mr. Poirier was missing. As you know, GAO is currently conducting a separate overall review of the Peace Corps' operations regarding its volunteers.

We conducted our investigation from June 1, 2001, through mid-July 2001 in accordance with investigative standards established by the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency. We interviewed Mr. Poirier's parents; representatives of the Peace Corps, including the Office of Inspector General (OIG); agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); U.S. Embassy personnel in Bolivia; Peace Corps volunteers; and Bolivian nationals who had contact with Mr. Poirier.

In summary, we determined that Mr. Poirier failed to follow certain Peace Corps location and notification procedures.¹ Although the Peace Corps Associate Director responsible for Mr. Poirier while he was in Bolivia knew that Mr. Poirier was not following these procedures, he took no steps to correct the situation and, as a result, lost track of Mr. Poirier. Furthermore, the Associate Director's failure to adequately monitor Mr. Poirier contributed to the difficulties encountered by the U.S. Embassy in its efforts to locate Mr. Poirier. Once it was determined that Mr. Poirier was missing, the U.S. Embassy, Peace Corps, multiple entities of the Bolivian National Police, and fire/rescue teams in and around La Paz and throughout Bolivia conducted an extensive search. As of the date of this letter, Mr. Poirier has not been found.

¹ Prior to beginning assignments, all Peace Corps volunteers in Bolivia are to take an 11-week training course that includes Peace Corps location and notification requirements for that country. We were told that Mr. Poirier attended such a course.

The Peace Corps Failed to Properly Supervise Mr. Poirier and Lost Track of Him

The Peace Corps Associate Director for Bolivia was directly responsible for Mr. Poirier while he was in Bolivia, as well as over 40 other Peace Corps volunteers in Bolivia. The Associate Director, who was responsible for helping the volunteers find housing and set up meetings with their Bolivian project supervisors, was also supposed to periodically check on the volunteers' well-being.

Mr. Poirier was assigned to work on a tourism project in the Zongo Valley, a remote area about 3 hours outside of La Paz. The Associate Director said that on December 22, 2000, he drove Mr. Poirier to the Zongo Valley to conduct a site inspection and to find a suitable place for him to live near the site. The Associate Director located a house in the village of Camisique where Mr. Poirier was assigned a room in which to live. The room was not available at the time, however, and Mr. Poirier returned with the Associate Director to La Paz that same day. This was the last day the Associate Director saw or spoke to Mr. Poirier. Mr. Poirier never moved into the room in the village of Camisique and it was not until March 6, 2001, that the Associate Director, after visiting the house in Camisique, learned that Mr. Poirier did not live there. Instead, Mr. Poirier had rented a room in the village of Zongo, further up the Zongo Valley from Camisique.

The Associate Director told us that Mr. Poirier failed to file a locator form, which is required so that volunteers can be reached if an emergency occurs. The Associate Director also said that Mr. Poirier failed to follow "out of site notification" policy, which requires volunteers to notify their Associate Director, their secretary, or a person they reside with when they are going to be away from their in-country place of residence for more than 24 hours. The Associate Director added that he had problems with Mr. Poirier's apparent reluctance to move out of the apartment that a group of volunteers had rented in La Paz to the room he thought Mr. Poirier had rented in the village of Camisique. The Associate Director said he knew through discussions with other volunteers that Mr. Poirier was still living in the La Paz apartment in January 2001, even though he should have been living in the village of Camisique at that time.

The Associate Director could not explain why he did not reach out to Mr. Poirier to discuss his failure to follow established procedures, saying only that he was very busy supervising other volunteers. The Associate Director said that it is the responsibility of the Peace Corps' office receptionist, who actually receives and files the locator forms, to notify him if a volunteer fails to file the form. The Associate Director believed that Mr. Poirier had not filed a locator form. However, the receptionist told us that Mr. Poirier did file a locator form on January 31, 2001, which indicated he was living at an apartment in La Paz. When we showed the Associate Director Mr. Poirier's locator form, he said that he had never seen it. The Associate Director also said that it did not really matter that Mr. Poirier had filed a form providing his La Paz address, because he did not submit a locator form with his actual address in the Zongo Valley.²

² During a search of Mr. Poirier's residence in the village of Zongo, a completed locator form with that address was found. The form had not been submitted to the Peace Corps' Bolivian office.

Furthermore, the Associate Director told us that when he returned a March 2, 2001, message from Mr. Poirier's Bolivian project supervisor on March 5, he learned that Mr. Poirier had missed a scheduled meeting with her on March 2. The Associate Director told us that the project supervisor required that Mr. Poirier touch base with her every 2 weeks. The Associate Director said he relayed this information to U.S. Embassy personnel when it was determined that Mr. Poirier was missing.

Mr. Poirier's Bolivian project supervisor told us that she informally agreed to meet with Mr. Poirier on a regular basis to discuss the project. She added, however, that there was never any agreement with Mr. Poirier or the Peace Corps that he meet with her every 2 weeks. The project supervisor also said that on March 2, she telephoned the Associate Director and left a message for him. On March 5, the Associate Director returned her call, and she told him that she wanted to schedule a future meeting with him and Mr. Poirier. She said she never told the Associate Director that Mr. Poirier had missed a scheduled March 2 meeting.

We informed the U.S. Embassy and the FBI of the Associate Director's and the Bolivian project supervisor's conflicting statements. The FBI subsequently interviewed the Associate Director, and the FBI told us that he admitted that his statement to us and U.S. Embassy personnel that Mr. Poirier had missed a scheduled meeting with his Bolivian project supervisor had no basis in fact. The Associate Director told the FBI that he said Mr. Poirier had missed a March 2 meeting to deflect blame elsewhere because he felt responsible for not keeping a closer watch on Mr. Poirier. According to the FBI, the best information available indicates that Mr. Poirier was last seen at the project supervisor's office in La Paz on or about February 22, 2001.

The Associate Director told us that the last e-mail he received from Mr. Poirier was on or about January 29, 2001, when he wrote that he was having a problem with the financing for his project in the Zongo Valley. The Associate Director said the e-mail concerned him and that on or about January 31, he asked his secretary to contact Mr. Poirier by telephone. He said his secretary was unsuccessful in locating Mr. Poirier. The Associate Director assumed that he had moved to his rented room in the village of Camisique. The Associate Director also said that he became so busy supervising the other volunteers that Mr. Poirier "dropped off my radar screen." He said he made no further attempt to contact Mr. Poirier.

Both the Country Director and Deputy Country Director for the Peace Corps in Bolivia told us that the Associate Director was not keeping close enough contact with Mr. Poirier. The Country Director said no one followed up on Mr. Poirier's failure to turn in his locator form. When we told the Country Director that Mr. Poirier had turned in his locator form for the La Paz apartment on January 31, she said this was the first she heard of it. The Country Director also said that if the Associate Director had reason to believe that Mr. Poirier was not working and living in the Zongo Valley, he should have done something about it. She also said that if the Associate Director knew that Mr. Poirier was visiting La Paz or his project supervisor, he should have also known that Mr. Poirier was not completing his out of site notification reports. The Country Director said the Associate Director should have corrected this situation.

Mr. Poirier's failure to follow established procedures and the Peace Corps' failure to keep track of him led to early difficulties in focusing the search.

The U.S. Embassy Initiated an Extensive Search When Notified That Mr. Poirier Was Missing

The Peace Corps was alerted that Mr. Poirier was missing on March 4, 2001, when Mr. Poirier's mother called the Deputy Country Director for the Peace Corps in Bolivia and reported that she had not heard from her son in over a month. That same day, the Deputy Country Director called the La Paz apartment where she believed Mr. Poirier was staying. The other Peace Corps volunteers told the Deputy Country Director that they had not seen Mr. Poirier since January 31. The Deputy Country Director told the Associate Director on March 4 that she was not able to contact Mr. Poirier.

The Country Director told us that even if Mr. Poirier's mother had not called on March 4, the Peace Corps would have initiated a search for him based on the fact that Mr. Poirier had missed a March 2 meeting with his Bolivian project supervisor. However, the Associate Director made the statement about the missed meeting, which was a fabrication, after he learned of the disappearance of Mr. Poirier as a result of the mother's telephone call. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that the Peace Corps would have initiated a search at that time.

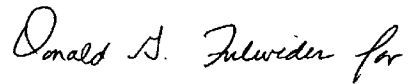
After he was notified on March 4 that Mr. Poirier was missing, the Associate Director attempted to locate Mr. Poirier on March 5, which included a telephone call and a trip to the Zongo Valley. On or about March 5, the U.S. Embassy was notified that Mr. Poirier was missing, and it immediately initiated and coordinated a search and investigation in an attempt to locate Mr. Poirier. The coordinated effort used available U.S. Embassy and Peace Corps personnel and various elements of the Bolivian government.

After being told about Mr. Poirier's disappearance on March 5, 2001, the Peace Corps' OIG sent an investigator to La Paz on March 16. The investigator searched for Mr. Poirier until March 31. On April 19, 2001, the FBI became involved after you, Senator Edward Kennedy, and Senator John Kerry asked for FBI involvement in an April 12, 2001, letter to Attorney General Ashcroft. The OIG investigator returned to La Paz on April 20 and stayed until May 3. The FBI's investigation took approximately 2 weeks and included polygraphing several suspects developed by the Bolivian National Police, and following leads that often led to remote parts of the Bolivian countryside.

The Bolivian National Police, which searched morgues, hospitals, prisons, hotels, and hostels in and around La Paz and throughout Bolivia, are still searching for Mr. Poirier. A Bolivian fire/rescue team conducted extensive searches in waterways and the Zongo Valley jungle. The U.S. Embassy and the Peace Corps have broadcast information about Mr. Poirier's disappearance throughout Bolivia in the print media, newspapers, tabloids, television, and radio announcing that a substantial reward is available. In addition, thousands of posters about Mr. Poirier's disappearance have been distributed throughout Bolivia.

We are sending copies of this letter to the Director and Inspector General of the Peace Corps; the Secretary of State; the U.S. Ambassador to Bolivia; and interested congressional committees. Copies of this letter will also be made available to others on request. This letter will be available at www.gao.gov. If you have any questions, please contact me at (202) 512-7455 or Assistant Director Patrick F. Sullivan at (202) 512-6722. Senior Special Agent John Cooney, Senior Attorney Barry Shillito, and Senior Analyst Shelia James made significant contributions to this investigation and letter.

Sincerely yours,



Robert H. Hast
Managing Director
Office of Special Investigations

(600897)

Mr. POIRIER. We have also found that the Peace Corps can be obstructive. Simple requests for information were always met with the response that the Freedom of Information Act came into force for our requests and that we must follow procedure.

Now, when we did submit for the information we wanted, we were met with denial of information and, in my perception, stonewalling. This practice seems to be consistently used to discover information which would damage the Peace Corps image from being obtained. Only after the *Dayton Daily News* sued to obtain the information and we had to sign off on it was it begrudgingly dispensed.

We also find the Peace Corps to be insensitive. Two examples. On January 13, 2002, an invitation was sent to my home. This is a year, almost a year after my son disappeared. We were sent an invitation to celebrate Peace Corps Day by sharing our experiences about our Peace Corps Volunteer's service and our thoughts. Needless to say, we declined. In other words, we were left on a mailing list despite all we had been through.

The second incident occurred when we were sent a letter by the Peace Corps director informing us that Peace Corps was going to close out our son's service. There is no resolution to his case. It is still an open case. Only after calls to Senator Kennedy, Kerry and our Representative Meehan did the director reverse his decision and agree to a 1-year extension with a review every year.

So far, another year's extension has been granted for this year extending our son's service to February 2005. We feel that our son should be kept active until there is a final outcome, whatever that may be.

We feel that he should be listed on the Wall of Remembrance at Peace Corps headquarters with a notation "Missing in Service" until such time as proof of his whereabouts and his status changes.

We know that since 9/11 there has been little, if any, active searching for our son. Embassy personnel has turned over. The country director and assistants have left Peace Corps service. The FBI agent in charge has been reassigned. We suspect that our son's disappearance is considered a cold case by the Bolivian national police, and it is sitting in a manilla folder tucked away.

Twice we have asked for Peace Corps to hire a private investigator to really concentrate on our son's case, and twice we have been rebuffed.

In closing, we have been met at every turn with the attitude at Peace Corps that it does not need fixing as it is not broken, and our son is or was responsible for whatever happened to him.

There is also an attitude that there should be no outside governmental oversight of Peace Corps other than within its own agency. The director has sent a letter to the Senate outlining the proposed changes and practices and protocols for volunteer safety. These changes are necessary and should be adopted immediately and financed immediately.

However, in order to ensure that the change does not only take place on paper, the Poiriers feel that there should be an entity doing oversight which has no vested interest in Peace Corps. Only after the safety of each and every individual volunteer is properly addressed should there be an expansion of Peace Corps. If not, the

incidents that that are reported in the daily news will increase perhaps exponentially as the number of volunteers increases. The robberies, rapes and murders will undoubtedly grow.

We as a family do not wish the Peace Corps mission to be changed, but before any other volunteer is harmed due to lack of proper security measures and the availability of every possible communication device and the ceasing of assignment of solitary volunteers to remote areas are stopped, the problems will only get worse.

Congress must be brave and bring about change. It must be done legislatively so that each succeeding Peace Corps director and assistant director will carry out the mandate to protect the volunteers first and foremost.

The Peace Corps must realize that the world is not the same as it was 42 years ago, and change is necessary to protect its lifeblood, the volunteers, without whom there is no Peace Corps.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Poirier follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF WALTER R. POIRIER

Dear Chairman Hyde and esteemed members,

The Poirier family is extremely grateful for this opportunity to speak to this committee regarding our grueling experience involving the Peace Corps and the disappearance of our son, Walter J Poirier. In the three years since his vanishing without a trace, we have been through a gamut of emotions, which no family should have to endure.

To start, we firmly believe that if we had not tried to contact our son on March 4, 2001, after not hearing from him for over a month, the Peace Corps would not have known he was missing for another week or two. Lack of at least a weekly reporting mandate, coupled with an influx of new PCVs, *Bolivia 26*, which seemed to overburden the management for Bolivia Peace Corps, is to blame. Trying to place too many volunteers in an effort to boost enrollment numbers, while not having enough qualified management to deal with the situation, caused the Peace Corps to lose contact with our son. We believe that our son actually disappeared sometime after *January 31, 2001*, as no Peace Corps personnel can confirm seeing him after that week. Whatever happened to him, he was declared officially missing by the Peace Corps on *March 6, 2001*. When I spoke with the Country Director, I asked what safety protocols were in place for volunteers whose assignments were in remote areas such as my son and what provisions were made to enable them to communicate with Peace Corps Bolivia headquarters. She replied that there was a radio telephone within two or three kilometers of my son's site. *The radio telephone was actually several miles upriver*. When asked why these young people had no cell phones, satellite phones, or GPS devices, her response was "we've been doing it this way for forty years". This attitude that the Peace Corps had no need for change is a recurring theme in Peace Corps liturgy.

We believe that the Peace Corps response was too little too late. There are numerous reasons for this. The aforementioned lack of oversight is one, but more importantly, there is a prevailing attitude of acceptance within Peace Corps management that many volunteers take off from their assignments without leave.

One of the reasons for this phenomenon of going AWOL, maybe a lack of specific goals in the work assignments, and lack of proper experience to match the work assignment. This may result in a high rate of early separation. When young college graduates, who have just devoted four long years in reaching a goal, are placed in an environment where there is little or no tangible success to be achieved, boredom sets in and this would seem to be the reason for the unauthorized leaves. This current generation has been raised on visual and tactile stimulation. They need positive feedback and reinforcement so that they feel what they are doing is having positive results. The push to increase the number of PCVs will only increase if the number of generalists decreases. We believe that the Bolivian Peace Corps management team felt that our son has taken one of those leaves, as they only sent his immediate supervisor to find him. We are not sure, but we believe that the embassy and the Bolivian National Police were not notified until several days after we alerted the Peace Corps. To compound the matter, the supervisor concocted a lie, stating

that our son had a meeting with his counterpart in early March 2001, at the La Paz government house. This assistant country director said he lied to protect himself after being confronted by the FBI. That is probably true, but we also believe that the constant theme of protecting the Peace Corps' image was a factor. *We believe that the lack of supervision, lack of a meaningful assignment and lack of a proper place to live all contributed to the loss of our son.*

From the beginning, we have found the Peace Corps to be more concerned with its image and protecting the aura and prestige of the Peace Corps than any other issue. In the first meeting with PC personnel from Washington on *March 26, 2001*, they stated that the search for Walter, had been "reinvigorated", then the Regional Director, Ms. Minutillo, and a psychologist, Ms. Gutmann, raised questions about our son's sense of responsibility and his work ethic. Our son had first been declared missing on March 6, 2001, and now we were being told that the search was reinvigorated? The second visit came on *April 6, 2001*, and this time Mr. Boswell, a member of PCs Inspector General's office accompanied Ms. Gutmann, along with a person who was to do a video for Bolivian television. Mr. Boswell, who said he was the lead investigator for my son's case and had just returned from Bolivia, intimated that it was not uncommon for PC volunteers to form relationships with the locals in their host countries, and hinted that they thought that this might be my son's case. On both occasions, there was a concern that we would say or do something that would impugn the Peace Corps image. This became more apparent, each time we tried to bring national attention to Walter's disappearance. The most glaring example occurred when we appeared on the Today Show in April 2001, there was a press release already being circulated as we were appearing. Further examples of this constant spin done by PR people within Peace Corps, is the outraged response to the two reports done by the GAO, especially the one which focused on our son which is GAO report #01-970R dated July 20, 2001.

We have also found the Peace Corps to be obstructive. Simple requests for information were always met with the response that the FOIA act came into force for our requests and that we must follow procedure. Now when we did submit for the information we wanted, we were met with stonewalling and denial of information. This practice seems to be consistently used to stop discovery of information, which could damage the Peace Corps image, from being obtained. Only after the Dayton Daily News sued to obtain the information, was it begrudgingly dispensed.

We also find the Peace Corps to be insensitive. Two examples: On January 13, 2002, we were sent an invitation to celebrate Peace Corps Day by sharing our experiences about our Peace Corps volunteer's service and our thoughts. In other words, we were left on a mailing list despite all we had been through. The second incident occurred when we were sent a letter by the Peace Corp Director, informing us that Peace Corps was going to close out our son's service. As there was no resolution to his case, we were outraged that such a letter would be forthcoming. Only after calls to Senators Kennedy and Kerry, and Representative Meehan, did the Director reverse his decision and agree to a one year extension with a review every year. So far another year's extension has been granted for this year extending our son's service to February 2005. We feel that our son should be kept active until there is a final outcome, whatever that may be. We feel that he should be listed on the wall of remembrance at Peace Corps headquarters with the notation "missing in service" until such time as proof of his whereabouts and status changes. We know that since 9/11 there has been little if any active searching for our son. Embassy personnel have turned over, the Country Director and Assistants have left Peace Corps service, and the FBI agent in charge has been reassigned. We suspect that our son's disappearance is considered a cold case by the Bolivian National Police and tucked away in a manila folder gathering dust. *Twice, we have asked for Peace Corps to hire a private investigator to really concentrate on our son's case, and twice we have been rebuffed.*

In closing, we have been met at every turn with the attitude at Peace Corps that it doesn't need fixing as it isn't broken and that our son is/was responsible for whatever has happened to him. There is also an attitude that there should be no outside governmental oversight of Peace Corps, other than within its own Agency. The Director sent a letter to the Senate, outlining the Peace Corps proposed changes to the practices and protocols for volunteer safety. The changes are necessary and should be adopted immediately. However, in order to insure that the change doesn't only take place on paper, the Poirier family feels that there should be an entity doing oversight which has no vested interest in Peace Corps. Only after the safety of each an every individual volunteer is properly addressed should there be an expansion of Peace Corps. If not, then the incidents that were reported in the Dayton Daily News will increase, perhaps, exponentially, as the number of volunteers' increases. The robberies, rapes, and murders, will undoubtedly grow. We as a family

do not wish that the Peace Corps mission be changed, but before any other volunteer is harmed due to lack of proper security measures, availability of communication devices at all times, and assignment of solitary volunteers to remote area is stopped, the problems can only get worse. *Congress must be brave and bring about change.* It must be done legislatively so that each succeeding Peace Corps Director and Assistant Director will carry out the mandate to protect the volunteers, first and foremost. *The Peace Corps must realize that the world is not the same place it was 42 years ago,* and change is necessary to protect its life blood, the volunteers, without whom, there is no Peace Corps.

If change is mandated through legislation, perhaps no other parent will have to appear before this body, after losing a precious son or daughter, due to lack of proper management security protocols and resistant attitudes toward change in the Peace Corps.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is the end of my prepared statement. I am now ready to answer any questions that your and any member of the committee may have.

Chairman HYDE. Thank you very much, Mr. Poirier.
Mr. Bruce?

STATEMENT OF JEFFREY BRUCE, EDITOR, "DAYTON DAILY NEWS"

Mr. BRUCE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee. I have been asked here today to talk a little bit about the *Dayton Daily News* investigation of the Peace Corps and the safety risks faced by its volunteers.

For 20 months, investigative reporter Russell Carollo and our Washington correspondent, Mei Ling Hopgood, examined the Peace Corps safety record. Our work included interviews with more than 500 people in the United States and 10 other countries. We filed 75 Freedom of Information Act requests and appeals, and ultimately we ended up suing the Peace Corps in Federal Court to obtain public records that document assaults against volunteers. That reporting resulted in a 7-day series that was published in 2003.

Major findings of that series show that violence against volunteers is widespread. Since 1961, more than 250 Peace Corps Volunteers have died, including 20 who were murdered, others who perished under mysterious circumstances and one volunteer, as we have just heard, who has been missing since 2001. That represents a death rate of about one volunteer every 2 months.

Since 1991, while the number of Peace Corps Volunteers has grown by less than 30 percent, the reported incidence of assaults against volunteers, and that includes a 112 percent increase in aggravated assaults, has more than doubled. In 2002, by way of example a Peace Corps Volunteer was assaulted or robbed every 23 hours. In 1977, male volunteers outnumbered females by a ratio of two to one. Today, women comprise a majority of Peace Corps Volunteers, and they represent 70 percent of the assault victims.

Volunteers frequently arrive at their sites fresh out of training and without a job to keep them busy. Some turn to drinking, using drugs, traveling to unsafe areas or engaging in other activities that put them in danger, our research showed.

The extent of this safety problem has been disguised for decades, partly because the assaults occurred thousands of miles away, partly because the Peace Corps has made little effort to publicize them and partly because the agency deliberately kept people from finding out while emphasizing the positive aspects of Peace Corps service.

The agency misled a number of families and the public about circumstances of several deaths. The details of that are in the written statement that I have provided. I must say also, though, in fairness, we also encountered a number of occasions where the Peace Corps was very helpful to families seeking information and was responsive to safety concerns.

The Peace Corps did not start collecting worldwide crime statistics until 1990, 28 years after it first sent volunteers overseas, and the statistics it now makes available to the public and Congress make it appear volunteers are safer than they actually are.

Though the Peace Corps calculates a crime rate based on the number of volunteers, it does not use the actual number of crime victims when calculating the rate; only the number of incidents. So, for example, when three women were raped in El Salvador in 1996, statistics from the Peace Corps database reflect a single rape incident. The agency still does not collect statistics on certain crimes, such as kidnappings and abductions, and murder is counted simply as an assault under the agency's system.

Too often, our reporters found, warnings about safety from Peace Corps safety officers have been ignored. In 1992, John Hale, then acting Inspector General for the Peace Corps, warned in a 43-page report to Congress of a marked increase in violent acts against volunteers worldwide. He told the *Dayton Daily News* that he quit the Peace Corps after working on the report in part because the agency ignored his warning. "The idea was to return . . . to the land of myth and legacy," he said, "not to make sure this was a good and effective agency."

This panel may find it interesting that it was easier getting information out of the former Soviet Union than it was out of the Peace Corps. "Ukraine is a democratic country," the regional police chief told us when supplying records of a volunteer's murder, an incident that the Peace Corps had warned volunteers not to discuss with the media. "The press is free," the Ukrainian police chief told us. "We have nothing to hide."

Compare that to the Peace Corps, which refused to even acknowledge some of our Freedom of Information Act requests, and when they did send records, and only after being sued, the agency removed the names of countries where assaults occurred, the dates assaults occurred, the names of country directors responsible for safety and other information that is routinely released by police departments here in the United States every day.

Since the publication of the series, there has been a great deal of debate among former Peace Corps Volunteers. We reference that in our written remarks that I have given you.

The Peace Corps has made changes. They now emphasize safety on their Web site, something that prior to publication of our series you would not have seen. That includes a video message from the director and, for the first time, the agency's annual report on assault, a report that the U.S. General Accounting Office has been trying to get the agency to post for years.

We note in our written report to you that there are also examples of Peace Corps Volunteers whose experience has been very, very meaningful in their lives. In fact, most of the 350 volunteers that we interviewed, including victims of assault, praised the Peace

Corps and feel it is one of the most important experiences that they have had.

Nonetheless, that is not necessarily representational of the statistics that show a rise in the increase of violence against volunteers. I will leave you with one quote from Jennifer Peterson, a volunteer who underwent 10 facial surgeries over 2½ years after being beaten with a rock in the African country of Lesotho.

She told the newspaper she felt abandoned by the Peace Corps. "I thought the Peace Corps was different from a typical government entity," she said. "I was expecting some support from them. I got nothing."

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Bruce follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JEFFREY BRUCE, EDITOR, "DAYTON DAILY NEWS"

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today. I've been asked to summarize the results of the Dayton Daily News investigation of the Peace Corps and the safety risks faced by its volunteers.

For 20 months, investigative reporter Russell Carollo and our Washington correspondent, Mei Ling Hopgood, examined the Peace Corps safety record.

The reporters interviewed more than 500 people in the United States and 10 other countries, filed 75 Freedom of Information Act requests and, ultimately, the newspaper sued the Peace Corps in federal court to obtain public records that document assaults against volunteers.

The reporting resulted in a seven-day series of articles that ran between Oct. 26–Nov. 1, 2003. Reprints of the series and related articles, including reaction from the Peace Corps and Peace Corps volunteers, were provided to this committee.

I might also add, Mr. Chairman, that Mr. Carollo and Ms. Hopgood are in attendance at this hearing.

Major findings from our investigation show that the Peace Corps puts volunteers in danger by sending them alone to some of the most dangerous corners of the world.

Violence against volunteers is widespread.

Since 1961, more than 250 Peace Corps volunteers have died—including at least 20 who were murdered, others who perished under mysterious circumstances and one volunteer, Walter Poirier, who has been missing since 2001.

That represents a death rate of about one volunteer every two months.

Since 1991, while the number of Peace Corps volunteers has grown by less than 30 percent, the reported incidents of assaults against volunteers—including rapes—has more than doubled.

In 2002, by way of example, a Peace Corps volunteer was assaulted or robbed every 23 hours.

In 1977, male volunteers outnumbered females by a ratio of 2 to 1. Today, women comprise a majority of Peace Corps volunteers—and they represent 70 percent of the assault victims.

The newspaper's investigation showed that many assaults were linked to a decades-old practice of sending young volunteers just out of college to live alone with virtually no supervision in remote, often violent, regions, in unsafe housing.

Volunteers frequently arrive at their sites fresh out of training without a job to keep them busy.

Some turn to drinking, using drugs, traveling to unsafe areas, or engaging in other activities that put them in danger. Alcohol was linked to nearly 1 in 6 deaths since 1962 and nearly 1 in 3 assaults since 1999, according to our research.

The extent of this safety problem has been disguised for decades, partly because the assaults occurred thousands of miles away, partly because the Peace Corps has made little effort to publicize them and partly because the agency deliberately kept people from finding out—while emphasizing the positive aspects of Peace Corps Service.

The agency misled a number of families and the public about the circumstances of several deaths; some families learned critical details about how their loved ones died for the first time from the newspaper.

One mother didn't know her daughter had attempted suicide in Ecuador before lapsing into a coma and dying.

"They just told me she had a massive stroke," the mother said.

The brother of another volunteer said the family was never told that his 22-year-old sister had written a resignation letter the day she disappeared in Africa or that the Peace Corps suspected suicide. Her body was found five days later floating in a river, and the family was led to believe a crocodile killed her.

The family of a man who was murdered in Ukraine was unaware of the role a young Ukrainian woman played in his death. The woman stole the volunteer's apartment keys, giving them to an acquaintance of the killer, and she is suspected to be the same woman who poisoned him the night he was killed.

However, we did find cases where the agency was responsive to volunteers' safety concerns and was helpful in providing information to families. Our observation was that the agency's track record was erratic and inconsistent in this regard.

The Peace Corps didn't start collecting worldwide crime statistics until 1990, 28 years after it first sent volunteers overseas, and the statistics it now makes available to the public and Congress make it appear volunteers are safer than they actually are.

Though the Peace Corps calculates a crime rate based on the number of volunteers, it doesn't use the actual number of crime victims when calculating the rate—only the number of "incidents."

So, for example, when three women were raped in El Salvador in 1996, statistics reflect a single rape incident.

The agency still doesn't collect statistics on certain crimes, such as kidnappings and abductions. Murder is counted simply as an assault under the agency's system.

Too often, warnings about safety from Peace Corps safety officers have been ignored.

In 1992, John Hale, then acting inspector general for the Peace Corps, warned in a 43-page report to Congress of "a marked increase in violent acts against volunteers worldwide."

Hale told the *Dayton Daily News* that he quit the Peace Corps after working on the report, in part, because the agency ignored his warnings.

"The idea was to return . . . to the land of myth and legacy," he said, "not to make sure this was a good and effective agency that was doing good and keeping people safe. People don't want to burst the myth of the culture."

You might find it interesting that it was easier getting information out of the former Soviet Union than out of Peace Corps.

"Ukraine is a democratic country," the regional police chief told us when supplying records of a volunteer's murder, an incident that the Peace Corps had warned volunteers not to discuss with the media.

"The press is free," the Ukrainian police chief told us. "We have nothing to hide."

Compare that to the Peace Corps, which refused to even acknowledge some of our FOIA requests and when they did send records (and only after being sued), the agency removed the names of countries where assaults occurred, the dates assaults occurred, the names of country directors responsible for safety and other information routinely released by police departments here in the United States every day.

The series has prompted vigorous debate among current and former volunteers and staff members. Much of that was prompted by the Peace Corps itself, which, even before we printed the first word was warning the national Peace Corps Association and its members that our reporting would be misleading.

John Hale, the former Peace Corps IG, told us he was not surprised by that defensiveness:

In dozens of investigations and audits, he said his staff was "often surprised at how little 'peace' there was in the corps when its virtue was questioned."

He warned us the reaction could turn fierce, *ad hominem* and visceral—his words. It has been.

However, within weeks of publication of our series, the Peace Corps redesigned its web site to include extensive information on safety and security.

The additional information includes a video message from the director and, for the first time, the agency's annual report on assaults—a report the U.S. General Accounting Office had been trying to get the agency to post for two years.

In fairness, it should be noted—as it was in our series—that most of the 350 volunteers we interviewed, including assault victims, looked favorably on their service saying it was a life-changing experience.

George Stengren's service in Africa inspired him to teach high school in Harlem. After teaching business skills in the African country of Togo, Tiffany Arthur of Dayton is an analyst in international agricultural trade. Melissa McSwegin of Kettering, who just finished three years as a volunteer, is working to eradicate the debilitating illness known as Guinea Worm disease in Niger.

Other volunteers have gone on to public service, including Ohio Gov. Bob Taft and former U.S. Congressman Tony Hall of Dayton, who continues to champion the

cause of hunger around the world as the ambassador to the United Nations' food relief agencies.

That acknowledged, the Peace Corps' own statistics clearly show that volunteers are at increased risk.

And the stories of volunteers who returned from service disillusioned—or who did not return at all—need to be heard.

One of them is Jennifer Petersen, a volunteer who underwent 10 facial surgeries over two and a half years after being beaten with a rock in the African country of Lesotho:

She said she felt abandoned by the Peace Corps. "I thought the Peace Corps was different from a typical government entity," she said. "I was expecting some support from them. I got nothing."

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman HYDE. Thank you, Mr. Bruce.
Mr. Ford?

**STATEMENT OF JESS FORD, DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL
AFFAIRS AND TRADE, U.S. GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE**

Mr. FORD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee. I am pleased to be here today to discuss GAO's recent work on the Peace Corps. Most of my testimony is based on a major report we issued in July 2002, supplemented by some additional information we have been able to obtain from the Peace Corps to update our analysis.

About 7,500 Peace Corps Volunteers currently serve in 70 countries around the world. The Administration intends to increase this number to about 14,000 over the next few years, and Congress has appropriated additional monies to the Peace Corps to support this expansion.

Volunteers often live in areas with limited access to reliable communications, police or medical services. As Americans, they may be viewed as relatively wealthy and, hence, good targets for criminal activity. In many countries, female volunteers face special challenges. More than a third of female volunteers report experiencing sexual harassment on at least a monthly basis.

My testimony today will summarize and update where possible key findings from our report related to trends in crime against volunteers and the agency's system for generating information; the Peace Corps' field implementation of its safety and security framework; the underlying factors that contribute to the Peace Corps' performance in the field. I will also discuss Peace Corps actions that have been taken since our report was issued and attempt to show what actions they have taken.

Peace Corps reported rates for most types of assaults have increased since the Peace Corps began collecting data in 1990. For example, the reported incident rate for major physical assaults nearly doubled from an average of about 9 per 1,000 volunteer years in 1991 to 1993 to an average of about 17 per 1,000 volunteers in 1998 to 2000. Our recent review of data for 2001 and 2002 show that this rate has not changed.

The full extent of crime against Peace Corps Volunteers is unknown because there is significant underreporting of crime by volunteers. We reported that Peace Corps had initiated efforts to encourage reporting and collecting additional data, but that there were other unrealized opportunities for additional examination of data. For example, our analysis showed that newer volunteers are

more likely to become victims of crime than their more experienced colleagues.

In response to our findings, in April 2003 the Peace Corps hired an analyst to enhance its capacity for gathering and analyzing crime data. The analyst focused on upgrading the crime data system and shifted responsibility for collecting data from the Medical Office to the newly created Safety and Security Office. According to the analyst, additional crime analyses have not yet been conducted as the focus has been on upgrading their collection and data reporting system.

We reported that Peace Corps headquarters had developed a safety and security framework, but that the field's implementation of the framework had produced varying results. While volunteers were generally satisfied with the agency's training programs, there was mixed performance in key areas such as developing safe and secure housing sites, monitoring volunteers and planning for emergencies.

For example, at each of the five posts we visited we found instances of volunteers who began their service in housing that had not been inspected and had not met Peace Corps guidelines. We also found variation in the frequency of staff contact with volunteers and in Peace Corps responsiveness to volunteer concerns about safety and security.

To improve safety and security practices in the field, in 2002 the agency increased the number of field based safety and security officers charged with reviewing post practices and assisting them in making improvements. They also created a safety and security position at each post.

The Peace Corps has hired a compliance officer to ensure that its rules are followed in the field. However, we recently reviewed some recent IG reports that indicate some safety and security shortcomings are continuing to occur in the field.

We reported that a number of factors, including staff turnover, informal supervision and oversight mechanisms and unclear guidance have hampered the Peace Corps' efforts to ensure high quality performance. For example, the Peace Corps reported that high staff turnover caused in part by the agency's statutorily imposed 5-year rule has had a direct relationship to their ability to institutionalize best practices in the field, a situation that the agency staff are continually in the process of reinventing the wheel.

We recommended that the Peace Corps address this issue. Congress has granted the Peace Corps authority to exempt safety and security staff from the 5-year rule, and the director has recently exempted 23 positions to carry out a more systematic way of addressing safety and security.

To strengthen supervision and oversight, the Peace Corps created an Office of Safety and Security that centralizes safety and security functions under an associate director. The office is supported by a staff member in each of the three regional bureaus, a compliance officer, an analyst and nine field based security officers. All of these positions have been created since we did our work in July.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, since we issued our report in July 2002, the Peace Corps has taken several steps to improve the safety and security of its volunteers. However, Peace Corps is still in

the process of implementing many of these actions, which are designed to improve the security environment that volunteers work under.

This concludes my statement.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Ford follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JESS FORD, DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND
TRADE, U.S. GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to be here to discuss Peace Corps' efforts to ensure the safety and security of its volunteers. My testimony is based on our July 2002 report¹ and information we were able to obtain from the Peace Corps to update our analysis.

About 7,500 Peace Corps volunteers currently serve in 70 "posts" (country missions) around the world. The administration intends to increase this number to about 14,000 over the next few years, and Congress has increased appropriations for the Peace Corps to support this expansion. Volunteers often live in areas with limited access to reliable communications, police, or medical services. As Americans, they may be viewed as relatively wealthy and, hence, good targets for criminal activity. In many countries, female volunteers face special challenges; more than a third of female volunteers report experiencing sexual harassment on at least a monthly basis.²

My testimony today will summarize and update, where possible, key findings from our 2002 report related to (1) trends in crime against volunteers and the agency's system for generating such information, (2) the agency's field implementation of its safety and security framework, and (3) the underlying factors that contributed to Peace Corps' performance in the field. I will also discuss actions that Peace Corps has taken to improve the safety and security of its volunteers since we issued our report.

We conducted fieldwork at Peace Corps' headquarters and visited five countries with Peace Corps programs to prepare our report. To develop our analysis, we:

- analyzed Peace Corps' crime data;
- reviewed agencywide safety and security policies, guidelines, training materials, volunteer satisfaction surveys, and Inspector General reports;
- interviewed key staff and more than 150 volunteers; and
- examined practices for selecting volunteer sites, developing emergency action plans, and performing other tasks.

We conducted our work from July 2001 through May 2002 and from February 2004 through March 2004, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

In summary, we found the following:

Peace Corps' reported incidence rates of crimes committed against volunteers have remained essentially unchanged since we last reported.³ Reported rates for most types of assaults have increased since Peace Corps began collecting data in 1990, but reported rates have stabilized in recent years. For example, the reported incidence rate for major physical assaults nearly doubled from an average of about 9 per 1,000 volunteer years in 1991–1993 to an average of about 17 per 1,000 volunteer years⁴ in 1998–2000. Data for 2001 and 2002 show that this rate has not changed. The full extent of crime against Peace Corps volunteers is unknown because there is significant underreporting of crime by volunteers. We reported that Peace Corps had initiated efforts to encourage reporting and collect additional data but that there were also other unrealized opportunities for additional examination of data. For example, our analysis showed that newer volunteers may be more likely

¹U.S. General Accounting Office, GAO-02-818, *Peace Corps: Initiatives for Addressing Safety and Security Challenges Hold Promise, but Progress Should be Assessed* (Washington, D.C.: July 25, 2002). We reported separately on events surrounding one specific security incident—the disappearance of a volunteer in Bolivia in early 2001. See *The Peace Corps Failed to Properly Supervise Missing Volunteer and Lost Track of Him*, GAO-01-970R (Washington, D.C.: July 20, 2001).

²Most recent available data, from *Peace Corps Volunteer Survey Global Report 2002*, Peace Corps (August 2003).

³The Peace Corps crime data system records and tracks data by criminal "event" rather than by volunteer; those charged with filing reports are instructed to count events involving more than one volunteer only once.

⁴One volunteer year is equivalent to 1 full year of service by a volunteer or trainee.

to become victims of crime than their more experienced colleagues. In response to our findings, in April 2003, Peace Corps hired an analyst to enhance its capacity for gathering and analyzing crime data. The analyst has focused on upgrading the crime data system and shifting the responsibility for data collection and analysis from the medical office to the newly created safety and security office, to place the responsibility for crime data in an office dedicated to safety and security. According to the analyst, additional crime analyses have not yet been conducted, as the focus has been on upgrading the process for collecting and reporting data.

We reported that Peace Corps' headquarters had developed a safety and security framework but that the field's implementation of the framework had produced varying results. While volunteers were generally satisfied with the agency's training programs, there was mixed performance in key elements of the framework such as in developing safe and secure housing sites, monitoring volunteers, and planning for emergencies. For example, at each of the five posts we visited, we found instances of volunteers who began their service in housing that had not been inspected and had not met Peace Corps' guidelines. We also found that the frequency of staff contact with volunteers and the quality and comprehensiveness of emergency action plans varied. Recent tests of the emergency action plans indicate that the agency has made improvements in the length of time needed to contact volunteers. To improve safety and security practices in the field, in 2002, the agency increased the number of field-based safety and security officers charged with reviewing post practices and assisting them in making improvements, and created a safety and security position at each post. Peace Corps hired a compliance officer charged with independently assessing each post's compliance with the framework. However, recent Inspector General reports indicate that safety and security shortcomings in the field are still occurring.

We reported that a number of factors, including staff turnover, informal supervision and oversight mechanisms, and unclear guidance hampered Peace Corps' efforts to ensure high-quality performance for the agency as a whole. For example, Peace Corps reported that high staff turnover, caused in part by the agency's statutorily imposed 5-year limit on employment for U.S. direct hire staff, had resulted in a lack of institutional memory, producing a situation in which agency staff are continually "reinventing the wheel." We made a recommendation that Peace Corps develop a strategy to address staff turnover, including an assessment of the "5-year rule"—a statutory restriction on the tenure of U.S. direct hire employees.⁵ In response to our recommendation on staff turnover and the difficulties it created, Peace Corps was granted authority to exempt safety and security staff from the 5-year rule. The agency has exempted 23 staff positions from the 5-year rule and plans to conduct a study to determine whether there are additional positions that should be exempted. To strengthen supervision and oversight, Peace Corps created an office of safety and security that centralizes safety and security functions under an associate directorship. The office is supported by a staff member in each of the three regional bureaus, a compliance officer, an analyst, and nine field-based security officers. We also recommended that Peace Corps develop performance indicators and report on its safety and security initiatives. The agency is still clarifying its guidance on how to apply its revised framework, revising its indicators of progress, and establishing a base line for judging performance in all areas of safety and security.

In conclusion, since we issued our report in July 2002, it is clear that the agency has taken a number of steps designed to improve the safety and security of its volunteers. However, Peace Corps is still in the process of implementing many of these actions and their full effect has yet to be demonstrated.

BACKGROUND:

Created in 1961, Peace Corps is mandated by statute to help meet developing countries' needs for trained manpower while promoting mutual understanding between Americans and other peoples. Volunteers commit to 2-year assignments in host communities, where they work on projects such as teaching English, strengthening farmer cooperatives, or building sanitation systems. By developing relationships with members of the communities in which they live and work, volunteers contribute to greater intercultural understanding between Americans and host country nationals. Volunteers are expected to maintain a standard of living similar to that of their host community colleagues and co-workers. They are provided with stipends that are based on local living costs and housing similar to their hosts. Volun-

⁵ See U.S.C. 2506(a)(5), (6) and Public Law 108-7, the Consolidated Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2003, as well as Public Law 108-199, the Consolidated Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2004.

teers are not supplied with vehicles. Although the Peace Corps accepts older volunteers and has made a conscious effort to recruit minorities, the current volunteer population has a median age of 25 years and is 85 percent white. More than 60 percent of the volunteers are women.

Volunteer health, safety, and security is Peace Corps' highest priority, according to the agency. To address this commitment, the agency has adopted policies for monitoring and disseminating information on the security environments in which the agency operates, training volunteers, developing safe and secure volunteer housing and work sites, monitoring volunteers, and planning for emergencies such as evacuations. Headquarters is responsible for providing guidance, supervision, and oversight to ensure that agency policies are implemented effectively. Peace Corps relies heavily on country directors—the heads of agency posts in foreign capitals—to develop and implement practices that are appropriate for specific countries. Country directors, in turn, rely on program managers to develop and oversee volunteer programs. Volunteers are expected to follow agency policies and exercise some responsibility for their own safety and security. Peace Corps emphasizes community acceptance as the key to maintaining volunteer safety and security. The agency has found that volunteer safety is best ensured when volunteers are well integrated into their host communities and treated as extended family and contributors to development.

REPORTED CRIME INCIDENTS HAVE INCREASED, BUT FULL EXTENT OF CRIME AGAINST VOLUNTEERS REMAINS UNKNOWN:

Reported incidence rates of crime against volunteers have remained essentially unchanged since we completed our report in 2002.⁶ Reported incidence rates for most types of assaults have increased since Peace Corps began collecting data in 1990, but have stabilized in recent years. The reported incidence rate for major physical assaults has nearly doubled, averaging about 9 assaults per 1,000 volunteer years in 1991–1993 and averaging about 17 assaults in 1998–2000. Reported incidence rates for major assaults remained unchanged over the next 2 years. Reported incidence rates of major sexual assaults have decreased slightly, averaging about 10 per 1,000 female volunteer years in 1991–1993 and about 8 per 1,000 female volunteer years in 1998–2000. Reported incidence rates for major sexual assaults averaged about 9 per 1,000 female volunteer years in 2001–2002.

Peace Corps' system for gathering and analyzing data on crime against volunteers has produced useful insights, but we reported in 2002 that steps could be taken to enhance the system. Peace Corps officials agreed that reported increases are difficult to interpret; the data could reflect actual increases in assaults, better efforts to ensure that agency staff report all assaults, and/or an increased willingness among volunteers to report incidents. The full extent of crime against volunteers, however, is unknown because of significant underreporting. Through its volunteer satisfaction surveys, Peace Corps is aware that a significant number of volunteers do not report incidents, thus reducing the agency's ability to state crime rates with certainty. For example, according to the agency's 1998 survey, volunteers did not report 60 percent of rapes and 20 percent of nonrape sexual assaults. Reasons cited for not reporting include embarrassment, fear of repercussions, confidentiality concerns, and a belief that Peace Corps could not help.

In 2002, we observed that opportunities for additional analyses existed that could help Peace Corps develop better-informed intervention and prevention strategies. For example, our analysis showed that about a third of reported assaults after 1993 occurred from the fourth to the eighth month of service—shortly after volunteers completed training, arrived at sites, and began their jobs. We observed that this finding could be explored further and used to develop additional training.

Efforts to Improve Data Collection and Analysis Are in Process:

Since we issued our report, Peace Corps has taken steps to strengthen its efforts for gathering and analyzing crime data. The agency has hired an analyst responsible for maintaining the agency's crime data collection system, analyzing the information collected, and publishing the results for the purpose of influencing volunteer safety and security policies. Since joining the agency a year ago, the analyst has focused on redesigning the agency's incident reporting form to provide better information on victims, assailants, and incidents and preparing a new data management system that will ease access to and analysis of crime information. However, these new systems have not yet been put into operation. The analyst stated that the re-

⁶Crime data are available through 2002. Based on our the assessment of crime data that we performed in preparing our 2002 report and subsequent discussions with agency officials, we concluded that the data we obtained to update the rates and trends in crime against volunteers were sufficiently reliable for purposes of this statement.

porting protocol and data management system are to be introduced this summer, and responsibility for crime data collection and analysis will be transferred from the medical office to the safety and security office. According to the analyst, she has not yet performed any new data analyses because her focus to date has been on upgrading the system.

SAFETY AND SECURITY FRAMEWORK UNEVENLY IMPLEMENTED IN THE FIELD:

We reported that Peace Corps' headquarters had developed a safety and security framework but that the field's implementation of this framework was uneven. The agency has taken steps to improve the field's compliance with the framework, but recent Inspector General reports indicate that this has not been uniformly achieved. We previously reported that volunteers were generally satisfied with the agency's training programs. However, some volunteers had housing that did not meet the agency's standards, there was great variation in the frequency of staff contact with volunteers, and posts had emergency action plans with shortcomings. To increase the field's compliance with the framework, in 2002, the agency hired a compliance officer at headquarters, increased the number of field-based safety and security officer positions, and created a safety and security position at each post. However, recent Inspector General reports continued to find significant shortcomings at some posts, including difficulties in developing safe and secure sites and preparing adequate emergency action plans.

Volunteers Are Generally Satisfied with Training:

In 2002, we found that volunteers were generally satisfied with the safety training that the agency provided, but we found a number of instances of uneven performance in developing safe and secure housing. Posts have considerable latitude in the design of their safety training programs, but all provide volunteers with 3 months of preservice training that includes information on safety and security. Posts also provide periodic in-service training sessions that cover technical issues. Many of the volunteers we interviewed said that the safety training they received before they began service was useful and cited testimonials by current volunteers as one of the more valuable instructional methods. In both the 1998 and 1999 volunteer satisfaction surveys, over 90 percent of volunteers rated safety and security training as adequate or better; only about 5 percent said that the training was not effective. Some regional safety and security officer reports have found that improvements were needed in post training practices. The Inspector General has reported that volunteers at some posts said cross-cultural training and presentations by the U.S. embassy's security officer did not prepare them adequately for safety-related challenges they faced during service. Some volunteers stated that Peace Corps did not fully prepare them for the racial and sexual harassment they experienced during their service. Some female volunteers at posts we visited stated that they would like to receive self-protection training.

Mixed Performance in Housing, Monitoring Volunteers, and Emergency Action Plans:

Peace Corps' policies call for posts to ensure that housing is inspected and meets post safety and security criteria before the volunteers arrive to take up residence. Nonetheless, at each of the five posts we visited, we found instances of volunteers who began their service in housing that had not been inspected and had various shortcomings. For example, one volunteer spent her first 3 weeks at her site living in her counterpart's office. She later found her own house; however, post staff had not inspected this house, even though she had lived in it for several months. Poorly defined work assignments and unsupportive counterparts may also increase volunteers' risk by limiting their ability to build a support network in their host communities. At the posts we visited, we met volunteers whose counterparts had no plans for the volunteers when they arrived at their sites, and only after several months and much frustration did the volunteers find productive activities.

We found variations in the frequency of staff contact with volunteers, although many of the volunteers at the posts we visited said they were satisfied with the frequency of staff visits to their sites, and a 1998 volunteer satisfaction survey reported that about two-thirds of volunteers said the frequency of visits was adequate or better. However, volunteers had mixed views about Peace Corps' responsiveness to safety and security concerns and criminal incidents. The few volunteers we spoke with who said they were victims of assault expressed satisfaction with staff response when they reported the incidents. However, at four of the five posts we visited, some volunteers described instances in which staff were unsupportive when the volunteers reported safety concerns. For example, one volunteer said she informed Peace Corps several times that she needed a new housing arrangement because her door-

man repeatedly locked her in or out of her dormitory. The volunteer said staff were unresponsive, and she had to find new housing without the Peace Corps' assistance.

In 2002, we reported that, while all posts had tested their emergency action plan, many of the plans had shortcomings, and tests of the plans varied in quality and comprehensiveness. Posts must be well prepared in case an evacuation becomes necessary. In fact, evacuating volunteers from posts is not an uncommon event. In the last two years Peace Corps has conducted six country evacuations involving nearly 600 volunteers. We also reported that many posts did not include all expected elements of a plan, such as maps demarcating volunteer assembly points and alternate transportation plans. In fact, none of the plans contained all of the dimensions listed in the agency's Emergency Action Plan checklist, and many lacked key information. In addition, we found that in 2002 Peace Corps had not defined the criteria for a successful test of a post plan.

Actions Taken to Improve Field Compliance, but Implementation Still Uneven:

Peace Corps has initiated a number of efforts to improve the field's implementation of its safety and security framework, but Inspector General reports continued to find significant shortcomings at some posts. However, there has been improvement in post communications with volunteers during emergency action plan tests. We reviewed 10 Inspector General reports conducted during 2002 and 2003. Some of these reports were generally positive—one congratulated a post for operating an "excellent" program and maintaining high volunteer morale. However, a variety of weaknesses were also identified. For example, the Inspector General found multiple safety and security weaknesses at one post, including incoherent project plans and a failure to regularly monitor volunteer housing. The Inspector General also reported that several posts employed inadequate site development procedures; some volunteers did not have meaningful work assignments, and their counterparts were not prepared for their arrival at site. In response to a recommendation from a prior Inspector General report, one post had prepared a plan to provide staff with rape response training and identify a local lawyer to advise the post of legal procedures in case a volunteer was raped. However, the post had not implemented these plans and was unprepared when a rape actually occurred.

Our review of recent Inspector General reports identified emergency action planning weaknesses at some posts. For example, the Inspector General found that at one post over half of first year volunteers did not know the location of their emergency assembly points. However, we analyzed the results of the most recent tests of post emergency action plans and found improvement since our last report. About 40 percent of posts reported contacting almost all volunteers within 24 hours, compared with 33 percent in 2001. Also, our analysis showed improvement in the quality of information forwarded to headquarters. Less than 10 percent of the emergency action plans did not contain information on the time it took to contact volunteers, compared with 40 percent in 2001.

UNDERLYING FACTORS CONTRIBUTED TO UNEVEN FIELD IMPLEMENTATION, BUT AGENCY HAS TAKEN STEPS TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE:

In our 2002 report, we identified a number of factors that hampered Peace Corps efforts to ensure that this framework produced high-quality performance for the agency as a whole. These included high staff turnover, uneven application of supervision and oversight mechanisms, and unclear guidance. We also noted that Peace Corps had identified a number of initiatives that could, if effectively implemented, help to address these factors. The agency has made some progress but has not completed implementation of these initiatives.

High staff turnover hindered high quality performance for the agency. According to a June 2001 Peace Corps workforce analysis, turnover among U.S. direct hires was extremely high, ranging from 25 percent to 37 percent in recent years. This report found that the average tenure of these employees was 2 years, that the agency spent an inordinate amount of time selecting and orienting new employees, and that frequent turnover produced a situation in which agency staff are continually "reinventing the wheel." Much of the problem was attributed to the 5-year employment rule, which statutorily restricts the tenure of U.S. direct hires, including regional directors, country desk officers, country directors and assistant country directors, and Inspector General and safety and security staff. Several Peace Corps officials stated that turnover affected the agency's ability to maintain continuity in oversight of post operations.

In 2002, we also found that informal supervisory mechanisms and a limited number of staff hampered Peace Corps efforts to ensure even application of supervision and oversight. The agency had some formal mechanisms for documenting and assessing post practices, including the annual evaluation and testing of post emer-

agency action plans and regional safety and security officer reports on post practices. Nonetheless, regional directors and country directors relied primarily on informal supervisory mechanisms, such as staff meetings, conversations with volunteers, and e-mail to ensure that staff were doing an adequate job of implementing the safety and security framework. One country director observed that it was difficult to oversee program managers' site development or monitoring activities because the post did not have a formal system for performing these tasks. We also reported that Peace Corps' capacity to monitor and provide feedback to posts on their safety and security performance was limited by the small number of staff available to perform relevant tasks. We noted that the agency had hired three field-based security and safety specialists to examine and help improve post practices, and that the Inspector General also played an important role in helping posts implement the agency's safety and security framework. However, we reported that between October 2000 and May 2002 the safety and security specialists had been able to provide input to only about one-third of Peace Corps' posts while the Inspector General had issued findings on safety and security practices at only 12 posts over 2 years. In addition, we noted that Peace Corps had no system for tracking post compliance with Inspector General recommendations.

We reported that the agency's guidance was not always clear. The agency's safety and security framework outlines requirements that posts are expected to comply with but did not often specify required activities, documentation, or criteria for judging actual practices—making it difficult for staff to understand what was expected of them. Many posts had not developed clear reporting and response procedures for incidents such as responding to sexual harassment. The agency's coordinator for volunteer safety and security stated that unclear procedures made it difficult for senior staff, including regional directors, to establish a basis for judging the quality of post practices. The coordinator also observed that, at some posts, field-based safety and security officers had found that staff members did not understand what had to be done to ensure compliance with agency policies.

Peace Corps Taking Steps to Address These Factors:

The agency has taken steps to reduce staff turnover, improve supervision and oversight mechanisms, and clarify its guidance. In February 2003, Congress passed a law to allow U.S. direct hires whose assignments involve the safety of Peace Corps volunteers to serve for more than 5 years. The Peace Corps Director has employed his authority under this law to designate 23 positions as exempt from the 5-year rule. These positions include nine field-based safety and security officers, the three regional safety and security desk officers working at agency headquarters, as well as the crime data analyst and other staff in the headquarters office of safety and security. They do not include the associate director for safety and security, the compliance officer, or staff from the office of the Inspector General. Peace Corps officials stated that they are about to hire a consultant who will conduct a study to provide recommendations about adding additional positions to the current list.

To strengthen supervision and oversight, Peace Corps has increased the number of staff tasked with safety and security responsibilities and created the office of safety and security that centralizes all security-related activities under the direction of a newly created associate directorate for safety and security. The agency's new crime data analyst is a part of this directorate. In addition, Peace Corps has:

- appointed six additional field-based safety and security officers, bringing the number of such individuals on duty to nine (with three more positions to be added by the end of 2004);
- authorized each post to appoint a safety and security coordinator to provide a point of contact for the field-based safety and security officers and to assist country directors in ensuring their post's compliance with agency policies, including policies pertaining to monitoring volunteers and responding to their safety and security concerns (all but one post have filled this position);
- appointed safety and security desk officers in each of Peace Corps' three regional directorates in Washington, D.C., to monitor post compliance in conjunction with each region's country desk officers; and
- appointed a compliance officer, reporting to the Peace Corps Director, to independently examine post practices and to follow up on Inspector General recommendations on safety and security.

In response to our recommendation that Peace Corps' Director develop indicators to assess the effectiveness of the new initiatives and include these in the agency's annual Government Performance and Results Act reports, Peace Corps has ex-

panded its reports to include 10 quantifiable indicators of safety and security performance.

To clarify agency guidance, Peace Corps has:

- created a “compliance tool” or checklist that provides a fairly detailed and explicit framework for headquarters staff to employ in monitoring post efforts to put Peace Corps’ safety and security guidance into practice in their countries,
- strengthened guidance on volunteer site selection and development,
- developed standard operating procedures for post emergency action plans, and:
- concluded a protocol clarifying that the Inspector General’s staff has responsibility for coordinating the agency’s response to crimes against volunteers.

These efforts have enhanced Peace Corps’ ability to improve safety and security practices in the field. The threefold expansion in the field-based safety and security officer staff has increased the agency’s capacity to support posts in developing and applying effective safety and security policies. Regional safety and security officers at headquarters and the agency’s compliance officer monitor the quality of post practices. All posts were required to certify that they were in compliance with agency expectations by the end of June 2003. Since that time, a quarterly reporting system has gone into effect wherein posts communicate with regional headquarters regarding the status of their safety and security systems and practices.

The country desks and the regional safety and security officers, along with the compliance officer, have been reviewing the emergency action plans of the posts and providing them with feedback and suggestions for improvement. The compliance officer has created and is applying a matrix to track post performance in addressing issues deriving from a variety of sources, including application of the agency’s safety and security compliance tool and Inspector General reports. The compliance officer and staff from one regional office described their efforts, along with field-based safety and security staff and program experts from headquarters, to ensure an adequate response from one post where the Inspector General had found multiple safety and security weaknesses.

However, efforts to put the new system in place are incomplete. As already noted, the agency has developed, but not yet introduced, an improved system for collecting and analyzing crime data. The new associate director of safety and security observes that the agency’s field-based safety and security officers come from diverse backgrounds and that some have been in their positions for only a few months. All have received training via the State Department’s bureau of diplomatic security. However, they are still employing different approaches to their work. Peace Corps is preparing guidance for these officers that would provide them with a uniform approach to conducting their work and reporting the results of their analyses, but the guidance is still in draft form. The Compliance Officer has completed detailed guidance for crafting emergency action plans, but this guidance was distributed to the field only at the beginning of this month. Moreover, following up on our 2002 recommendation, the agency’s Deputy Director is heading up an initiative to revise and strengthen the indicators that the agency uses to judge the quality of all aspects of its operations, including ensuring volunteer safety and security, under the Government Performance and Results Act.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be happy to respond to any questions you or other Members of the Committee may have at this time.

Chairman HYDE. Thank you, Mr. Ford.
Mr. Quigley?

STATEMENT OF KEVIN F.F. QUIGLEY, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PEACE CORPS ASSOCIATION

Mr. QUIGLEY. Good morning, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, my name is Kevin Quigley, and I am the President of the National Peace Corps Association, the only national organization for Peace Corps Volunteers, staff, family and friends.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Committee to provide a volunteer’s perspective on the important issue of safety

and security of Peace Corps Volunteers. My comments this morning are informed by literally conversations with more than 1,000 volunteers in small and large groups over the past 7 months.

In briefly presenting a volunteer's perspective, I will make three main points. Some of the discussion does not provide adequate context to gauge the severity of the problem. Two, a number of the proposals could jeopardize what makes Peace Corps a singular success. Three, in devising a response, it is important that any legislation provide for additional funding so that the goal of doubling Peace Corps can be met.

Among the community of those who have served, there is broad, deep and passionate support for Peace Corps. This community understands the vital importance of having volunteers working overseas to promote peace through training individuals in their host country, educating them about the United States and, upon their return, educating Americans about the countries in which they served.

Support for the Peace Corps mission continues despite the growing awareness of concerns about our country's security and the safety and security of volunteers. I would like to provide some perspective on this important issue by describing my own experience.

I became a volunteer in 1976 and served for 3 years. My group arrived in Thailand a month after the last United States soldiers stationed there during the Vietnam War departed. Like many volunteers who had gone before and after me, I knew there was some risk related with my assignment since it was in one of the most isolated and poor parts of the country.

Although there was considerable ongoing fighting in Dan Sai district where I was posted, I never felt threatened or in danger. This was due to the fact that I was included in and identified as part of the community. It seemed that all of the people in that district understood who I was and that I was teaching their children.

The very nature of my assignment in a remote area far from where tourists traveled or where there were scant Americans made a deep impression on the people I worked with and lived with. This encouraged them to see Peace Corps and the government that supported it in profound and important new ways.

If I had not been placed in such a remote area, for which I was well prepared, and I discuss in my written statement some of the preparation for that, I would not have been able to contribute or learn anywhere near as much as I did. I have heard from hundreds of other volunteers who had comparable kinds of postings in remote or sensitive areas, and they share my assessment.

In the aftermath of the tragic events of September 2001, following the 2002 GAO report and in a lead up and in the aftermath of the series published by the *Dayton Daily News*, there has been a lively discussion in the Peace Corps community about safety and security issues.

Within this community, there is a broad spectrum of opinion. However, among those of us who have served we agree that safety and security of volunteers must be of paramount concern. All our members grieve for the 252 volunteers who have lost their lives in service and have enormous sympathy for our fellow volunteers who have experienced harm. Whenever a tragedy occurs or whenever a

volunteer is harmed, we expect and in fact demand that Peace Corps do everything humanly possible to be responsive.

There is also a sense that the discussion on safety and security misses the broader context of whether the Peace Corps experience is, relatively speaking, any more risky in terms of homicides and assaults than life of a comparable cohort in urban America, overseas development workers or volunteers with Peace Corps' counterparts in Germany, Great Britain, France or Japan.

In fact, one of the most eloquent testimonies to the importance of Peace Corps service is provided by the Radley family. I mention this because Gordon Radley, a volunteer Malawi, was not able to be here today. Gordon's older brother, Larry, along with another volunteer, David Crozier, were the first two volunteers who died in service. After graduating from college, Larry's sister, Elana, and his brother, Gordon, both joined the Peace Corps, knowing full well the risks associated with service.

There have been proposals to post at least two volunteers to each site or consolidate groups of volunteers. In my view, that would diminish the experience and lessen the impact of Peace Corps without necessarily enhancing the safety and security of volunteers.

Two volunteers posted together tend to be less well integrated and perhaps less well accepted by the local community. Two volunteers are more likely to be perceived as able to look after each other, thus diminishing the community's need to have a stake in their safety and security.

Mr. Chairman, I understand that the Committee is considering legislation to address the issue of volunteer safety and security. Speaking simply as someone who has served, I would say changing the status of the Inspector General is unlikely to have any effect on volunteers' safety and security.

Creating an Office of Ombudsman would be perceived by the Peace Corps community as being responsive to many former volunteers, especially those who have been harmed or become ill during their service and not received promised post service support. Establishing statutorily the Office of Safety and Security would be a way to underscore the Congress' concern with a commitment to ensure the safety and security of volunteers.

Chairman Hyde and Ranking Member Lantos and Members of the Committee, the Peace Corps community thanks you for addressing the issues of volunteer safety and security. The National Peace Corps Association will work with you and the Committee to ensure that these issues are addressed in a way that protects volunteers, preserves the essence of Peace Corps and best advances U.S. interest.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Quigley follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KEVIN F.F. QUIGLEY, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PEACE CORPS ASSOCIATION

Chairman Hyde and Ranking Democratic Member Lantos, my name is Kevin F. F. Quigley, President of the National Peace Corps Association. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Committee to provide a volunteer's perspective on the important issue of the safety and security of Peace Corps Volunteers.

The National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) is a 501(c)(3) organization, founded 25 years ago in 1979 as the National Council of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers. The NPCA is the only national organization for Peace Corps volunteers, staff, family

and friends whose lives have been influenced by the Peace Corps experience. Our mission is to “help lead the Peace Corps community in fostering peace through service, education and advocacy.”

In the NPCA network, there are 30,000 individuals who participate in our national or affiliates’ activities and support our mission. These individuals reside in all 50 states. The NPCA’s 154 affiliated groups are in 45 states and the District of Columbia. The NPCA’s objective is to be a resource for the Peace Corps community. The NPCA has programs to promote service, enhance understanding of other cultures, and to advocate around issues of concern to our community.

Over the past seven months, I have met with 25 of NPCA’s affiliates and talked about the Peace Corps experience with more than a thousand former volunteers and staff in small and large groups. The one common theme through all of these discussions is that Peace Corps service is a defining experience that continues to shape our lives. Among the community of those who have served, there is broad, deep and passionate support for Peace Corps, which often leads to ongoing service back home. This community understands the vital importance of having volunteers working overseas—as they have done in more than 130 countries—to promote peace through training individuals in their host country, educating them about the United States, and upon their return educating Americans about the country in which they served. This reflects Peace Corps’ three goals, which are perceived as every bit as vital today as when Peace Corps was established 43 years ago.

This fervent support for the Peace Corps mission continues despite the growing awareness of concerns about our country’s security and the safety and security of volunteers. This community understands more than ever the vital importance of America’s positive engagement with the rest of the world especially at the grassroots level, living together as friends and colleagues, which only Peace Corps provides.

During these many conversations, I also have learned that no two of the 171,000 Americans who have served as Peace Corps volunteers have an identical experience. There are vast differences based on the volunteer, the country, the assignment, the era, and the people we served. There are, however, many common threads linking these experiences across the generations of volunteers regardless of the country or region of service or the nature of the assignment. These common threads include serving in often remote locations, as perhaps the only American, learning another language and living with others as friends and colleagues and developing a deep appreciation of another culture. Even with these many commonalities, it is difficult to generalize. So, Mr. Chairman, I would like to provide some perspective on this important of safety and security issue by describing my own experience.

I became a Peace Corps Volunteer in 1976 and served for three years. My group arrived in Thailand the month after the last U.S. soldiers stationed there during the Vietnam War departed but while there was still fighting, especially in the border areas.

My training involved three components: 1) Thai language, 2) Teaching English-As-A-Second Language, and 3) Cross-cultural. Having studied nine different languages in some fashion, I can attest that Peace Corps provided the finest language training I ever received. The technical training was sufficient to ensure that we would succeed as teachers in a Thai classroom. The cross-cultural training component provided invaluable insights about how to live and adapt to what was then an extremely foreign culture.

After 9-weeks of training, I was sent to an isolated post in Dan Sai district, Loei province approximately ten miles from the border with Laos in an area described as “sensitive.” In that area there was ongoing fighting between insurgents and government forces. The closest volunteers were 60 kilometers to the South or 90 kilometers to the East, both over mountainous roads that were nearly impassable in the monsoons. Like many volunteers who had gone before me, I knew there was some risk associated with my assignment since it was in one of the most isolated and poorest parts of the country.

Before my arrival at my post in Dan Sai, a Peace Corps program manager had visited the site and met with the host counterpart to ensure that there was an appropriate work assignment and housing.

Although there was considerable ongoing fighting in Dan Sai district, including frequent firings of 105 millimeter shells, common sightings of helicopter gunships and ambushes of government outposts, at my site I never felt threatened or in danger. This was due to the fact that I was included in and identified as part of the community. It seemed that all the people in Dan Sai understood who I was and that I was teaching their children. Since I was incorporated into the community, filing the emergency action plan that Peace Corps required of all volunteers seemed a bit unnecessary if not unreal.

While a volunteer in Dan Sai, I was visited by the Country Director—who 25 years later gave me a copy of my letter regarding his visit. I was also visited by one other volunteer who lived in the provincial capital, who I would visit typically once a month. Communication was by mail since there was no phone service in my district. To make a phone call required travel to the provincial capital, 90 kilometers away. However, the mail and a yearly monitoring visit plus periodic trips to Bangkok for training or medical purposes were sufficient. Modern technology, especially satellite and cell phones and access to the internet, provides today's volunteers a much greater ability to stay in touch with the in-country Peace Corps staff, as well as their family and friends at home.

In my second and third years, I worked in more urban settings. I transferred from Dan Sai because I thought I could make more of a contribution at a larger institution. Typically, I would be visited once a year by a Peace Corps official.

The very nature of my initial Peace Corps assignment—in a remote area far from where tourists traveled or where they were scant Americans—made a deep impression on the people I worked and lived with. This encouraged them to see Peace Corps and the government that supported it in profound and important new ways, contributing to the most memorable experience of my life. That was truly remarkable given that the consequences of the war in Southeast Asia were still reverberating around the region.

I recognize that my experience was unique to me and happened decades ago. Based on what I have learned from many other volunteers, however, it has some bearing on this topic. My experience involved Peace Corps basic approach to volunteer placement: 1) site assessment, 2) volunteer training, 3) monitoring, and 4) emergency planning. If I had not been placed in such a remote site, for which I was well prepared, I would not have been able to contribute or learn anywhere near as much as I did. I have heard from hundreds of other volunteers who had comparable kinds of postings in remote and “sensitive areas,” and they share my assessment.

In the aftermath of the tragic events of September 2001, there has been growing public attention to the issue of safety and security of Americans overseas, including Peace Corps volunteers. Following the 2002 GAO Report and in the lead up and the aftermath of a series published by *The Dayton Daily News*, there has been lively discussion in the Peace Corps community about safety and security issues.

Within this community there is a broad spectrum of opinion. However, among those of us who have served we agree that safety and security of volunteers must be a paramount concern. All our members grieve for the 252 volunteers who have lost their lives in service and have enormous sympathy for our fellow volunteers who have experienced harm. Whenever a tragedy occurs or whenever a volunteer is harmed we expect—in fact demand—that Peace Corps do everything humanly possible to be responsive.

There is also a sense that the discussion on safety and security misses the broader context, whether the Peace Corps experience is, relatively speaking, any more risky in terms of homicides and assaults than life for a comparable cohort in urban America, overseas development workers or for volunteers with Peace Corps German, British, France and Japanese counterparts. In Appendix II, The GAO Report provides a brief comparison between Peace Corps and other programs that place volunteers overseas. Unfortunately, there is no statistical comparison regarding what those agencies experiences are with safety and security.

In fact, one of the most eloquent testimonies to the importance of Peace Corps service is provided by the Radley family. I mention this because Gordon Radley, a volunteer in Malawi, was not able to testify today. Gordon's older brother Larry along with another volunteer, David Crozier, were the first two volunteers who died in service. Larry death's firmly shaped the future of the Radley family. After graduating from college, Larry's sister Elana and his brother Gordon both joined the Peace Corps knowing full well the risks associated with service.

In addition, there is concern among the community that the necessary attention to safety and security does not diminish the essential uniqueness and value of the Peace Corps experience—allowing Americans to live and work alongside our host country counterparts. Much of this value is based on a flexible approach to posting volunteers, whether it is in urban or rural settings. Volunteers are sent to where there is a cooperating host institution offering appropriate work, access to essential services, suitable housing, and an expressed need for them. All volunteers also prepare a plan for responding to emergencies. As I learned from the volunteers who were recently evacuated from Haiti, these plans work remarkably well. This is attested to by the fact that in the more than 30 post closings over the past decade due to civil war, political unrest, or concerns about repercussions related to the war in Iraq, there has not been an incident where a volunteer was harmed.

There have been some proposals to post at least two volunteers to each site or consolidate groups of volunteers. That would diminish the experience and lessen the impact of Peace Corps without necessarily enhancing the safety and security of volunteers. Two volunteers posted together tend to be less well integrated and perhaps less well accepted by the local community. Two volunteers are more likely to be perceived as able to look after each other, thus diminishing the community's need to have a stake in their safety and security.

There is also some concern that the resources required to address safety and security concerns may undermine Peace Corps' unique and vital contributions to U.S. foreign policy. This is especially the case if adequate funding is not provided to enable Peace Corps to meet the President's goal of doubling the size of Peace Corps, which is endorsed by the community.

In addition, the community believes that there is an opportunity to significantly expand the number of countries where Peace Corps is operating. Doing this would be extremely beneficial to the national interest. This can be done without jeopardizing volunteer's safety and security, although it may require that Peace Corps develop a more flexible approach to programming. For example, this may require relying on technical cooperation agreements in lieu of bilateral agreements as in the recent case of Mexico. It may also require somewhat shorter or more flexible assignments, perhaps only a year service or two years service that could be interrupted for a short period for a home visit.

Doubling the size of Peace Corps and expanding to new countries are goals endorsed by the community. It will require significant new resources, which do not appear to be forthcoming. Thus, any new requirements related to safety and security that Congress decides to implement must be accompanied by additional financial resources.

Much of the discussion seems to miss the fact that concern with volunteer safety and security is not new. Recently, I have had the chance to talk with seven of the Peace Corps Directors, spanning from the first Director to the current Director. For all of these directors, safety of the volunteers was a critical issue. Over the past few years, significant new investments have been made to address these issues in the context of current global realities.

Mr. Chairman, I understand that the Committee is considering legislation to address the issue of volunteer safety and security. I have had a chance to see briefly a draft of this legislation, which I understand has three main components: 1) make the Office of Inspector General more independent by having the Inspector General be a presidential appointment, 2) create an Office of Ombudsman, and 3) establish statutorily the Office of Safety and Security.

Speaking simply as someone who has served, I would say that:

- Changing the status of the Inspector General is unlikely to have any effect on volunteer's safety and security.
- Creating an Office of Ombudsman would be perceived by the Peace Corps community as being responsive to many former volunteers, especially those who have been harmed or become ill during their service and not received promised post-service support. They will perceive that their concerns are being addressed by a strong, vibrant mechanism advocating for their interests.
- Establishing statutorily the Office of Safety and Security would be a way to underscore the Congress's concern with and commitment to ensure the safety and security of volunteers and a recognition that these issues are a current reality and will be with us for many decades to come. This Office should be charged with notifying any volunteer victimized by crime be notified about the processing of criminal charges.

Recently, I have also heard reports of changes that may affect the Office of Medical Services. The community considers this Office critical to volunteer's safety and security and wishes to see that this Office has the resources required and the authority necessary to play its critical role.

It is essential that whatever Congress does to address this issue of volunteer safety and security should not impede the fundamental mission and style of Peace Corps, which has contributed to its success over the past four decades. Equally important is that whatever Congress does on this issue should not detract from the vitally important goal of expanding the numbers of serving volunteers and that the President's 2005 budget request is met.

Chairman Hyde and Ranking Democratic Member Lantos, the Peace Corps community thanks you for addressing the issue of volunteer safety and security. The NPCA will work with you and the Committee to ensure that these issues are ad-

dressed in ways that preserve the essence of the Peace Corps mission and best advance U.S. interests. We will also work relentlessly so that the President's budget request can be met, providing many more Americans with the opportunity to serve their country through the Peace Corps and to bring that experience back to America.

Thank you.

Chairman HYDE. Thank you, Mr. Quigley.
Inspector General Smith?

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE CHARLES D. SMITH,
INSPECTOR GENERAL, THE PEACE CORPS**

Mr. SMITH. Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today.

My testimony addresses two subjects; the role of the Office of Inspector General in Peace Corps Volunteer safety and security and the proposed legislation on the Peace Corps IG's independence.

As the General Accounting Office report makes plain, volunteer safety and security needs careful and continuing review, and staff turnover is a major impediment to professional management.

In the new safety and security design, the IG now has principal responsibility for the agency's response to violent crimes against volunteers. With the director's office and the general counsel, we developed a protocol about how the agency will respond to violent crimes against volunteers. It clarified the IG's responsibility and authority to assist and coordinate in the prosecution of these crimes and established a cleaner balance between medical care for victims and pursuit of justice for victims.

In January 2004, the director reinforced for all overseas offices and headquarters that this protocol is agency policy. It works in this way. We receive regular incident reports about both major crimes against volunteers and crimes of less immediacy that still carry signals about safety.

When a volunteer is a victim of a violent crime, our investigators are quickly involved. We are careful, however, not to interfere with any medical care while we help launch the investigative process.

Overseas and headquarters offices notify us of the incident. We continue contact with them and at the State Department work with diplomatic security and the Embassy's regional security officer. Through the RSO, we assist in developing the best evidence for local trial from witness statements to photo spreads to DNA analysis, and as needed we accompany witnesses back for lineups, depositions and trial.

We consult with the Justice Department's Office of Foreign Litigation and obtain assistance from the FBI, including the forensic laboratory at Quantico and the overseas legal attaches, from the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center and from the Secret Service Forensic Services Division. In short, we manage and coordinate the agency's part of the investigative and prosecution process from the initial incident to the closing of the case.

In addition to the work of our investigators, our program evaluations and audits have for years included a section on safety and security. Audits focus on post physical and vehicle security. Evaluations concentrate on elements of volunteer safety and security such as site development, housing, jobs, in-country transportation and

emergency action plans. Our program and management assessments will continue to include reviews of overseas volunteer safety and security.

In summary, we consider volunteer safety and security to be a significant area for our attention. We are part of the Peace Corps, and the major focus of the Peace Corps is the volunteer. We give high attention to risks volunteers may face, crimes they may encounter and how the agency protects their safety and security. We do this in our evaluations and audits and through our work on individual cases.

We assist in investigations and prosecutions and hopefully convictions of criminals who have injured volunteers. Our success sends a message of deterrence. Volunteers must be respected and protected.

We also identify places requiring special attention; for example, a vacation beach area where a volunteer was seriously assaulted, and in turned out five local women also were attacked. It is now off limits to volunteers.

Our work has impact case by case through deterrence and commanding respect for volunteers and by identifying situations that require the attention of the many offices overseas and here within the agency itself and outside that are part of the system providing safety and security to volunteers.

Turning to the question of IG independence, I want to distinguish between independence based on one's ability and relationship with the director and independence based upon legal and structural support. I have enjoyed the former, while being troubled about the latter.

The IG Act places all designated Federal entity IGs—that is the IGs appointed by agency heads—and their staffs under their agency's personnel rules. The IG and OIG staff today are, therefore, subject to Peace Corps Act's nonrenewal term limits.

Amending the Inspector General Act to make the Peace Corps IG a Presidential, Senate confirmed appointee, would cure the serious independence issue that the Peace Corps IG uniquely, among all IGs, currently faces; periodic, but uncertain, reappointment within a set, nonrenewal timeframe. This amendment would protect the IG and OIG staff from the restrictions affecting independence that are built into the agency's personnel rules. As in other IG offices, it would permit the development of a core professional staff, increase sophistication about the agency, work on longer term projects and greater insight and complexity and analysis.

As an alternative, amending the Peace Corps Act to exempt the IG and OIG staff positions from time limits on employment would remove the most immediate statutory impediment to the IG's independence and his or her hiring, training and retaining the most capable staff.

To close on a personal note, I will reach 8½ years of Peace Corps employment this August, first as deputy and then as IG. I have had five extensions under three directors. I have felt no effort to influence my personnel decisions, and no extension I have sought for staff has been denied. I do know, however, that in the earlier history of our office extensions were denied.

In any case, the Peace Corps Act itself invites and even requires intrusion through the director's discretion into the IG's personnel decisions and his or her own tenure. Both affect the IG's independence. Amending the IG Act as proposed would be the most sure resolution of this problem. Amending the Peace Corps Act to lift the 5-year rule from the IG and staff would also resolve the most important structural and legal impediment to independence.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to testify today.
[The prepared statement of Mr. Smith follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE CHARLES D. SMITH, INSPECTOR GENERAL,
THE PEACE CORPS

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today.

In this written statement, I will address the role of the Office of Inspector General in Peace Corps Volunteer safety and security and the proposed legislation on the Peace Corps IG's independence. As the General Accounting Office report makes plain, Volunteer safety and security needs careful and continuing review, and staff turnover in the Peace Corps is a major impediment to professional management.

In the post-9/11 era, the agency has given unambiguous priority to Volunteer safety and security. The Director created the Office of Safety and Security with responsibility for overseas training, data collection and analysis, and physical security here and overseas. This is the preventative office which will guide the agency's response to safety and security issues surrounding Volunteer service.

In addition, the Director appointed a Compliance Officer, who has focused on two main areas. First is up-to-date emergency action plans. The high quality of this work became clear when the Peace Corps' evacuated Volunteers from Cote d'Ivoire, Morocco, and Haiti. Her second area of attention is IG reports. She receives all our reports, both preliminary and final, and works with the regions to obtain evidence that posts have carried out the agreed-upon responses to our recommendations, with particular attention to safety and security.

In the new safety and security design, the IG now has principal responsibility for the agency's response to violent crimes against Volunteers. With the Director's office and the General Counsel, we developed the "Protocol: Violent Crimes Against Volunteers," which clarified the IG's responsibility and authority to assist and coordinate in the prosecution of serious crimes against Volunteers. In January 2004, the Director advised all overseas offices and headquarters that the Protocol is agency policy. We are in regular contact with the Director, the regions, overseas posts, and the Offices of Safety and Security, Medical Services, Special Services, and General Counsel, among others. . . Compliance is working: we are receiving regular notice of incident reports, both major crimes—e.g., rape, aggravated assault, robbery—and crimes of less immediacy—e.g., simple assault, theft, burglary—that still carry important signals about safety. Importantly, the Protocol also establishes a cleaner balance between medical care for victims and pursuit of justice for victims. The GAO report noted that "the Volunteer's identity and details of the incident may not be disclosed" in cases of sexual assault.¹ The new Protocol clarifies, however, that such fundamental information is needed for law enforcement purposes, and there are full privacy protections against its disclosure.

When a Volunteer is the victim of a violent crime, our investigators are quickly involved. We are careful not to interfere with any medical care while we help launch the investigative process. The country director and headquarters offices notify us of the incident; we continue contact with them and, at the State Department, work with Diplomatic Security and the embassy's RSO; through the RSO, we assist in developing the best evidence for local trial, from witness statements to photo spreads to DNA analysis; and, as needed, we accompany witnesses back for lineups, depositions, and trial. We consult with the Justice Department's Office of Foreign Litigation, and obtain assistance from the FBI, including the forensic laboratory at Quantico and the overseas legal attaches, the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, and the Secret Service Forensic Services Division. In short, we manage and coordinate the agency's part of the investigative and prosecution process from the initial incident to the closing of the case.

¹ United States General Accounting Office, "Peace Corps: Initiatives for Addressing Safety and Security Challenges Hold Promise, but Progress Should Be Assessed," July 2002, at p. 45.

In addition to our investigations of cases, our program evaluations and audits have for years included a section on safety and security. Audits focus on post physical and vehicle security. Evaluations concentrate on elements of Volunteer safety and security, such as site development, housing, jobs, in-country transportation, and emergency action plans. Our program and management assessments will continue to include reviews of overseas office and Volunteer safety and security. An example of one safety and security issue is our urging action on monitoring and closing Volunteer hostels, and the agency has issued directives tightening requirements. Another safety and security area we always examine overseas, but have not addressed formally on an agency-wide basis, is job development. A good job is a central element in Volunteer safety and security, and each of our reports covers jobs and assignments as both a program and safety issue.²

Turning to the question of IG independence, I want to distinguish between independence based on one's ability and support from the agency's administration and independence strengthened by legal and structural support. I have enjoyed the former while being troubled about the latter.

All three parts of the proposed legislation would impact the work of the Office of Inspector General, but the first is clearly most important to us.

It would establish the Peace Corps Inspector General as a Presidential, Senate-confirmed appointee by amending the Inspector General Act. This change would directly address the Peace Corps IG's independence through the appointment and removal power and the term of office for the IG and OIG staff. It would cure the serious independence issue that the Peace Corps IG, uniquely among all IGs, currently faces: periodic but uncertain reappointment within a set, non-renewable time-frame.

IGs appointed by the President can only be removed by the President, with communication to Congress.³ In Designated Federal Entities,⁴ IGs are appointed by agency heads⁵ and may be removed by them, with Congress being informed after the fact.⁶ Since the IG Act does not specify a term of office, removal under this procedure requires action by the agency head. Like other heads of DFE agencies, the Peace Corps Director may remove the IG at any point under the IG Act.

While the Peace Corps Director exercises the regular DFE appointment and removal authority, the Peace Corps Act—which requires that a term limit on employment be set for all employees—gives him additional appointment and removal flexibility.

In the Peace Corps, appointments do not exceed 30 months, and the employee may receive a series of reappointments, some as short as a year or even a few months.⁷ While 8½ years is the maximum total appointment term under the Peace Corps Act,⁸ the IG, like any other Peace Corps employee, faces possible termination of employment every 30 months or less. This is because Peace Corps policy splits the five-year limit into half, a first tour of 30 months and a likely but not required second tour of 30 months.⁹

Applying the Peace Corps Act's appointment and removal provisions to the IG can impact the appearance of IG independence through short, sequential appointments and can accomplish IG removal simply through appointment expiration. In contrast, under the IG Act, appointments are unlimited and removals must be reported to

² See id. at pp. 15–17.

³ See The Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, Title 5, Appendix, section 3(a) and (b).

⁴ Id. Section 8G(a) defines “federal entity” and lists Designated Federal Entities, which include the Peace Corps.

⁵ Id. Section 8G(c): “. . . the Inspector General shall be appointed by the head of the designated Federal entity in accordance with the applicable laws and regulations governing appointments within the designated Federal entity.”

⁶ Id. Section 8G(e): “If an Inspector General is removed from office or is transferred to another position or location within a designated Federal entity, the head of the designated Federal entity shall promptly communicate in writing the reasons for any such removal or transfer to both houses of Congress.”

⁷ Each Peace Corps employee receives form SF-50: Notification of Personnel Action, which includes a “not to exceed” date, recording when the appointment will end. An extension is reflected in a new SF-50 by a change in the NTE date.

⁸ The Peace Corps Act, Section 2506, established parameters for employment. There is a regular tour not to exceed 5 years, and agency policy has split that period into two 2½ year or 30 month tours. The Director is given discretion to extend an employee's appointment by one year and by another 2½ years, with both types of extensions exercised under certain criteria. Extension periods can be shortened or further subdivided. In sum, the outside length of employment is 8½ years, reached through incremental steps. Finally, before a person is eligible to re-apply to work at the Peace Corps, they must have been outside for as long as they most recently were employed: in for 3 years, out for 3 years.

⁹ On a personal note, I will reach 8½ years of Peace Corps employment this August, and as Deputy and then IG, I have had five extensions under three Directors.

Congress. These same rules apply to OIG staff, and for the first five years, personnel decisions are made by the IG.¹⁰ Because OIG staff are Peace Corps employees subject to the “five-year rule,” their extensions require the Director’s approval. I may hire them for five years—the maximum I can control—but for anyone to work in the OIG beyond five years, I need the Director’s approval, and there still remains the 8½ year ceiling.¹¹ In this fashion, the Peace Corps Act injects itself through the Director’s discretion into the IG’s personnel decisions, and presents an additional limit on independence.¹²

Like this bill, DFE IG leadership has focused on IG appointments and has proposed that the IG Act be modified in two ways. One would establish a term limit—9 years has been suggested since it spans administrations—that is renewable. The other would permit IG removal only for cause.

The idea of an ombudsman is useful. In some situations, the OIG acts as an ombudsman. Staff or Volunteers come to us seeking the kind of help that we conclude is best referred to an office in the agency for their attention. Other Peace Corps offices may serve in an ombudsman role, too: for example, General Counsel, American Diversity/EEO, and Special Services. If establishing an ombudsman office were recommended, the function might, like the Designated Agency Ethics Official, be located in the Office of the General Counsel, with the statute providing necessary special authority, including mandatory access to the Director, and the Director using his budgetary authority to make it effective.

One concern I have with a statutory Office of Safety and Security is possible impact on agency flexibility. For instance, today that Office is responsible for background checks on U.S. direct hires, traditionally a personnel function. The responsibility for IT security might also be housed elsewhere. The bill places both under the Office. The most important focus of the Office should be Volunteer safety and security. Anything separate from that should, I would suggest, call for a second look.

Thank you. We would be pleased to provide any further information you need.

Chairman HYDE. Thank you very much, and I might mention, General Smith, that I share your dislike for silly term limits which downgrades the priceless value of experience.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, sir.

Chairman HYDE. Director Vasquez, would you sit at the table?

We will now entertain questions. I would ask the Members to try to be brief so we can everybody get a chance to ask questions.

Ms. McCollum?

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To the Poirier family, I am very sad for the loss of your son, Walter. You should not have been lied to, and you should not have been treated so insensitively by having your name on a list as it continued, and for that I apologize.

I had the opportunity to be with Ms. Brooks, director in South Africa, in which when we visited a Peace Corps site we asked about safety concerns as there were two women there, one who was just finishing up her service, a woman who after retirement as a nurse

¹⁰Through the IG Act, DFE employees are subject to the employment rules of their agency. Section 8G(g)(2) provides: “In addition to the other authorities specified in this Act, an Inspector General is authorized to select, appoint, and employ such officers and employees as may be necessary for carrying out the functions, powers, and duties of the Office of Inspector General and to obtain the temporary or intermittent services of experts or consultants or an organization thereof, subject to the applicable laws and regulations that govern such selections, appointments, and employment, and the obtaining of such services, within the designated Federal entity.” I have made one change from Peace Corps practice. Unlike all other Peace Corps appointments, including the IG, I appoint OIG staff for a five year tour, rather than a 30 month tour with possible extension.

¹¹I wish to underscore that, in my experience, there has been no effort to influence my personnel decisions, and no extension I have sought for staff has been denied. I do know, however, that in the earlier history of our office, extensions were denied.

¹²Congress applied the idea of unlimited appointments to the Peace Corps in the 2003 appropriations law, which gave the Director discretion to make unlimited appointments for positions in the safety and security area, with explicit authority to consider the OIG for this purpose. This statutory authority was based on a recommendation in the General Accounting Office report on Peace Corps safety and security.

volunteered in the Peace Corps, and another individual who was just coming on, someone younger.

They said one of the most important things to their safety was integration in the community and following the community norms and standards, which were different for women than they are here in the United States.

I also from reading some of the reports, both provided by the government report and in the *Dayton News*, have found that using good judgment is very important, but also the use of alcohol was very much in having the Peace Corps Volunteers be in jeopardy. It was a major, major factor in many of the stories.

As you mention that you have now realigned into the Peace Corps and have 80 people, if I understood correctly, working on safety and security, what more do you think the Peace Corps can do to make volunteers aware of the consequences of alcohol and the awareness of how a cross cultural relationship and gender roles place particularly female volunteers at risk for sexual assault?

Mr. VASQUEZ. Congresswoman, the approach that we have taken in terms of moving forward relates principally to the kind of training that we have retooled in light of the fact that the majority of the volunteers serving in the Peace Corps today are women. It was not always that way, but it is that way today, and the trends indicate that it will continue to be so in terms of the number of applicants and the number of women serving in the Peace Corps.

What we have done is in our training processes in the preservice training, which I think was some of the discussion that you had when you were visiting in country, we have retooled some of that training to heighten the issue of cultural sensitivities. Some of the traditions and values that we have in this country may not be applicable in a host country where volunteers serve. So we elevate the awareness in some of the training that some of the issues that may surface during the course of a Peace Corps Volunteer's service can create problems and create challenges.

I do believe that one of the key elements to being successful for us, whether it is safety and security or it is cultural awareness, is going to be in the training. We are very, very sensitive to that great need because we do get the feedback, as you were able to hear from some volunteers. This is the way things are evolving in light of a changing world, in light of a changing demographic of Peace Corps, as we are also experiencing when we talk about older volunteers who are serving in the Peace Corps, and couples serving in the Peace Corps.

There are the norms that are different in the host country that we need to address, and we are trying to do so by virtue of the training modules that we provide during those 12 weeks of preservice training and then in-service training.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Thank you.

Mr. Bruce, I read some of the *Dayton Daily News* stories and the accounts of sexual violence, assaults, robberies. They are very chilling, and it is clear that the Peace Corps as an agency has a major responsibility to keep volunteers safe.

It is also clear that volunteers also have a responsibility for their own personal safety and health. After reading your stories, what responsibility do volunteers have themselves, as the director and I

were discussing, in alcohol use awareness as in cross cultural sensitivity? What did you find that the personal responsibility of all the volunteers were in these instances?

Mr. BRUCE. Yes. I think it was very clear that some of the volunteers who ended up being victims of violence of one kind or another were engaged in unwise or unsafe activities.

I think there is a mixture of issues associated with that, which includes where they were at the time, and I think one of the issues that emerged from our reporting were questions about whether or not there are adequate work in advance before placing of volunteers, whether or not the housing conditions that volunteers arrive at are adequately checked out in advance and safe, whether or not their mission and training is sufficient in advance of their arrival that they do not have a lot of idle time on their hands that ends up getting misused in activities.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. I understand that, but it is a mutual responsibility.

Mr. BRUCE. No question about it.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Chair, I just want to say that the world is a changing place, and it is a very dangerous place. The Peace Corps is needed more than ever, and we need to make sure that we give the Peace Corps the tools so the director can make the experience a safe and secure one.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman HYDE. The gentleman from California, Mr. Royce?

Mr. ROYCE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have had the opportunity, Director Vasquez, to meet with a number of Peace Corps Volunteers in Africa over the years, but even on short trips, and one comes to mind in Nigeria, we saw the risks that overseas development workers take.

During a period of time in 1999 when myself and Secretary Powell were in Nigeria as election monitors. There was another team that former President Carter was with—two members of that team were robbed at gunpoint. This is the type of risk that Peace Corps Volunteers are inherently in in many of these difficult places, many of these remote locales where they try to do their work.

Africa, unfortunately, sees a great deal of civil strife, and civil conflict there can evolve very, very rapidly. You had to pull volunteers out of Madagascar and out of Cote d'Ivoire, and I talked with those volunteers in Africa about their experiences there.

How often have Peace Corps Volunteers been evacuated, and what happens in an emergency situation like this, and what is the decision process to return them back into the country?

Mr. VASQUEZ. Congressman, the process of risk management for us is ongoing and is constant. Part of that is being vigilant, monitoring developments in countries, and I would use Haiti as a recent example, the most recent evacuation. Cote d'Ivoire was another example. Madagascar was the first evacuation that occurred during my time here at the Peace Corps.

We monitor activities as they begin to surface in country. We work with the Embassy, with the regional security officer, with our own safety and security personnel, and with the country director. The country team begins to discuss scenarios and issues that start to develop.

I would prefer to not go into much intricate detail because I think that that is information that we would like to reserve so that it is kept confidential, but, generally speaking, what we do is assess the situation.

We evaluate the conditions and circumstances, and essentially for me as the director and as a person who makes the ultimate decision, my test is that when volunteers' work is disrupted or interrupted to the extent that they can no longer do their work, then it is time to evaluate the possibility of consolidation of volunteers to a certain location and ultimately to evacuate. If an evacuation occurs, we deploy the kind of resources, whether it is aircraft or it is landcraft, whatever we need to do to get those volunteers out of country.

Once we have suspended or evacuated, rather, a program, we make a decision about suspending, closing a program, and we go through a process of internal discussions, as well as talking to staff, talking to the chief of mission in that host country.

If we decide that we are going to consider going back, we do a full assessment of the country as if we were entering the country for the first time. We evaluate medical, security, operational, programmatic issues, and support of host government.

All of those processes are evaluated, and then ultimately a recommendation is made to me, and a decision is made about returning to a country.

Mr. ROYCE. Let me also ask you. In light of this post 9/11 world, what changes have you made in the Peace Corps since your arrival specifically to enhance volunteer safety?

You mentioned the increase by 80 of safety and security staff and the reorganization of that staff to better communicate and better monitor volunteers. What is the daily role of these new safety and security staff personnel, and could you maybe tell us how they monitor volunteers in-country?

Mr. VASQUEZ. First of all, the field based staff that I talked about, which is about 95 percent of those new employees who are involved in safety and security, include a safety and security coordinator at every post in Peace Corps.

The responsibility of that safety and security coordinator is to ensure that forms, locator forms, documents that need to be filed by volunteers, measures that need to be met by posts, arrive in a timely and compliant fashion. This is so that there are no glitches in the timetables for accountability on the locator forms for volunteers, accountability on complying with issues relative to the GAO reports that have been done. The Inspector General works with the country director to ensure that we are responding to those safety and security issues.

In addition to that, the country director, who is not a new employee, but we have one in every country, is the ultimate person who is accountable at post for safety and security in country.

We have added additional regional safety and security officers who cover regions of the world and supplement and support the safety and security coordinators. They have regions in the world that they cover. We have nine, and we intend to expand that next year by adding another three regional safety and security officers.

We have designated at headquarters an associate director for safety and security who reports to me. That is a first at Peace Corps. We have now a person fully dedicated, a research psychologist, who now looks at our data in terms of crime statistics and trends to identify, analyze, evaluate and make recommendations on where we may need to change practices, policies and procedures in order to enhance safety and security.

So it takes on many layers of responsibility, but the bulk of the deployment of personnel in these new slots that we have implemented are in the field.

Chairman HYDE. The gentlelady from California, Ms. Napolitano?

Ms. NAPOLITANO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It is good to see you, Mr. Vasquez. I was not here to hear your presentation. I apologize.

In listening to the testimony, and again my condolences to the family and other families who have lost volunteers, my question in listening to and reading some of the testimony is the fact that about 70 percent of your volunteers are now women. I guess maybe I want to gear my comments to that.

There is an increase. How is this affecting your program? How are you dealing? How are you promoting special training for them in safety and in cultural differences in several of those areas?

According to what I am reading, the *Dayton Daily News* suggests that they are sent abroad and do not receive proper training, and there is little or no supervision. To me, if you are supposedly giving them proper training how is that training being given, to whom and in what amount geared to the country they are going to?

Mr. VASQUEZ. Well, first of all, I think it is important to mention that the procedures that we use today in terms of safety and security and the discussion about safety and security begins when the applicant meets up with the recruiter.

Our recruiters in our 11 offices across the country realize that safety and security is a major issue. Consequently, the discussion about the risks of safety and security, whether it is a man or woman volunteer, young-, old-, or middle-aged couples, begins at a very early stage.

That is followed up then, by the time a potential volunteer who then becomes a nominee goes to their staging here in the United States for 2½ days. We have added time within that training phase to talk about safety and security, with emphasis obviously on women because there is this increased percentage of women volunteers, so that is part of the training.

Once the volunteer gets to the country in which he or she is going to serve, there is a 12 week training program during which again safety and security is emphasized, up to and including having to meet certain core competencies in order to be able to complete the 12 week training program.

Within that training program there is discussion about cultural sensitivities, about some of the higher sensitivities that women may have to have because of cross cultural issues, because of society's norms in the country in which they are going to serve, personal safety, personal management of safety, certain areas about public transportation, about housing, about the kinds of things that

that country in particular has experienced as opposed to just a boilerplate, across-the-board training module. It is about the country in which they are going to serve.

Consequently, once the volunteer completes that 12 week training program, they are sworn in as volunteers. During the course of time additional in-service training opportunities are provided, and there are mentors, and volunteer leaders, who also provide guidance to women volunteers where necessary and appropriate.

Chairman HYDE. Ms. Napolitano, I am going to trespass on your time. I expect a vote any second. May I ask Mr. Weller if he has a question?

Ms. NAPOLITANO. If I have the ability to come back because I have one other question to ask.

Chairman HYDE. We will come back if we have time.

Mr. Weller, briefly please.

Mr. WELLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the courtesy of my friend and colleague from California for the opportunity.

Mr. Poirier, for both you and Mrs. Poirier, my heart goes out to you. Peace Corps has tremendous support in this country and this Congress with President Bush, and your son clearly was demonstrating his love of our country, as well as his commitment to service. We are very saddened by the loss of your son, and we thank you for his commitment to our country and for the world.

Director, I realize the challenge for you is these were challenges, many of which you inherited, and you have been working to respond to them. Just walk me through the process. If a volunteer is a victim of an attack, what are the steps that are taken? If you could just share with us the steps that are taken?

You know, I think we all realize there are people in the world hostile to America, hostile to our interests, who recognize the good will that is created as a result of the work of volunteers in the Peace Corps, so perhaps by harassing and intimidating they discourage them from being there and reduce the good impression we make, particularly in the hearts and minds of others around the world.

What are the steps that are taken? What is the role of the victim in dealing perhaps if the attackers are apprehended in their prosecution? Can you just walk us through that process?

Mr. VASQUEZ. Well, Congressman, what happens is that a volunteer reports a crime, and they are all reportable, but obviously there are varying degrees depending on the kind of crime it is.

Assuming it is a reportable crime, it may involve, and there are variations on this, but it may involve a report to local law enforcement to engage local law enforcement in terms of reporting. It is also reported to the Peace Corps medical officer in-country who then fills out and completes a report depending on the nature of the crime against the volunteer.

The country director is notified and gets involved. If it is a crime that involves a situation of an active pursuit, where it demands immediate attention, the regional security officer from the mission may be involved. The Embassy may be involved. Resources may be deployed where necessary on the guidance of the regional security officer.

Under our new protocol, the Inspector General's Office is notified. The Inspector General then makes an evaluation of the kinds of resources that he needs to deploy. The communication is established between the IG, the regional security officer, and the country staff, and resources are deployed in accordance with the seriousness of the crime and the situation and the circumstances. Then the appropriate people are used for both the investigation and subsequently, with the Inspector General, the prosecution and administration of justice that takes place in that country.

This new protocol I believe is going to serve us quite well because it is going to be part of a more diligent process. But it is also going to provide a tracking process so that volunteers who are victimized are provided the kind of support and resources that they need, given the variation of legal systems that are applied throughout the world. That is a brief snapshot.

Mr. WELLER. Director, just a quick followup. Technology is getting better, particularly in areas of communication all around the world. There are more cell phones every time I travel anywhere than I have ever seen before, so there is wireless capability.

I was wondering. What are you doing in that area? As part of that question also, are you reconsidering the policy of sending volunteers out by themselves?

Mr. VASQUEZ. First of all, we use communication technology based on the country and the reliability of the communication system. In some cases, cellular phones are used. In some countries, 90 plus percent of the volunteers have cellular phones. In other cases it is not reliable, and in other places it is nonexistent.

Whether there are cell phones or no cell phones, what we try to do is build layers of communication mechanisms so that it is not just about cell phones. If the system goes down for whatever reason, we need to have a backup system. We build that system within a community where a volunteer is placed, whether it is local law enforcement or the partner organization with whom the volunteer works or is assigned to, but we build an infrastructure for notification.

We have instances where host families have called because a volunteer has been ill, has been needed to be transported, so the communication systems are multi-layered.

I think that as far as the issue of co-locating or someone referred to clustering volunteers, I think as Mr. Quigley has accurately remarked, that putting two volunteers or multiple volunteers in one location can, one, be a potential security risk. It can also be a distraction and a disruption to the kind of work that volunteers should be doing as volunteers because, for over 43 years, one of the core values of Peace Corps service has been integration into the community.

That is really the basis of the interaction, the promotion of cross-cultural understanding, the integration into the community, building the kinds of relationships that make for a successful and fulfilling experience for Peace Corps Volunteers. I think that at this juncture, the models that have been used for Peace Corps are, I think, effective. I think they have been successful.

I also need to add that there has been a perception created by some that volunteers are just sent out to some rural location and

left to be by themselves. That is not true. The fact of the matter is that before a volunteer goes out to site there are discussions with partner organizations, with the community where that volunteer is going to be serving, and there are also volunteers within reasonable proximity.

We have done surveys to test the time and the distance that volunteers have between each other and the frequency with which volunteers see each other, not to mention staff.

Chairman HYDE. I am going to have to interrupt.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Thank you.

Chairman HYDE. Mr. Weller's time has expired. We have to go over and vote. There are four votes pending, so I am going to adjourn the Committee.

I would very much like Mr. Bruce and Mr. Ford to comment in writing if you can at your convenience on the corrective measures that Director Vasquez has introduced as to their adequacy and what remains to be done so we can move this along, if anything. I am very pleased at Director Vasquez's testimony.

This has been a wonderful panel. It has been instructive. We know a lot more than we knew before we started, and we are going to pursue this so that we can end up being helpful to the Peace Corps and to our country.

I apologize, Mr. Farr, for not getting to you. As we fade into the distance, you are welcome to take over.

Mr. FARR. Thank you very much. I know that we are rushed.

Mr. Poirier, I came here for you. I am a returned Peace Corps Volunteer. I served in Colombia where Mr. Crozier and Mr. Radley, the first volunteers ever killed, died in an airplane accident.

I am here because I also experienced a horrible tragedy while serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer. After my mother died of cancer in the United States, my sister and father came to visit me in Colombia. My sister was a junior in high school on summer vacation, she was only 16 years old. My sister, my father and I went horseback riding. My sister was thrown from a horse and we took her to a rural hospital, and they said nothing was wrong. A day later she died. She died because the hospital just did not have the equipment to diagnose her problem.

I was very angry. I was sort of angry at Colombia where I was a Peace Corps Volunteer. I was sort of angry at life, angry at God and religion. I was pretty depressed. One day, though, I just realized that that is why I was in the Peace Corps, to try to improve the situation so that people would have access to health care and other services. That aspiration, to make a difference, is what eventually drove me into politics.

I am here today because I really want to urge the Committee not to change the nature of the Peace Corps and not to create a "fortress America" Peace Corps Volunteer. That would destroy the nature of the Peace Corps.

The most interesting comment that I have heard in all the years that I have been in Congress, was spoken by General Abizaid last week. General Abizaid is the General for all of CENTCOM, which covers parts of Africa and all of the Middle East. There are 270 people serving under him.

He said something very profound to the Appropriations Committee on military construction. He said that until the United States learns to cross the cultural divide, we will never have peace in this world.

The only successful way we are learning to cross the cultural divide, the only really successful way, is through Peace Corps Volunteers because they do go to countries throughout the world, and they do take risks. I am concerned for their safety, but I think that with good training, and with good site placement, and if we address the issues that Director Vasquez has talked about, we can improve security for volunteers.

I strongly urge this Committee not to overreact and try to create more of a bureaucracy, more rules, more regulations that are going to hinder or keep volunteers from reporting incidents. Try to preserve that initial spirit of Peace Corps that has served us so well.

What is so fascinating about the Peace Corps is the demand to go in the Peace Corps has always been high, and I think it is now at an all-time high. The demand from other countries to have Peace Corps Volunteers is also at an all-time high.

We are doing something right, and the only thing that stands in the way is whether Congress is going to appropriate enough money and enough resources to get the job done.

This Committee passed the bill that authorized doubling the size of Peace Corps, and I urge you that we follow through with this commitment. If you have to make some administrative changes so be it, but not so that it hinders the role of work of the volunteer in the field.

Thank you for allowing me to sit in. Mr. Poirier, I am very, very sorry about the loss of your son.

Mr. ROYCE [presiding]. We thank the gentleman from California.

We also want to express our deep appreciation and admiration for all that members of the Peace Corps and their families have done. We also want to thank you all for traveling to testify here today, for your input. We again appreciate that.

At this time, this hearing stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:15 p.m. the Committee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HONORABLE TOM LANTOS, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

H.R. 4060

Mr. Chairman, I first want to thank you for your strong interest in the Peace Corps, its nearly 8,000 volunteers, and the larger Peace Corps community. The thoughtful attention that this Committee had lent to the Peace Corps Expansion Act of 2003 continued last week during our Full Committee hearing on safety and security issues within the Peace Corps, and is evident in today's consideration of this bill.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, last year's Peace Corps Expansion Act authorized appropriations for the Peace Corps for five years and developed at least three fundamental elements for ensuring that the doubling of the Peace Corps is focused properly.

Mr. Chairman, while these accomplishments are significant—and a testament to the ability of this Committee to influence positively an agency's operations even without an enacted Peace Corps reauthorization—much more can be done to improve the health, safety, and security of Peace Corps volunteers, as our hearing last week demonstrated.

According to the representative from the General Accounting Office, the Peace Corps is still not capturing fully the extent of crime against volunteers due to under-reporting by the volunteers themselves for a host of reasons, including a belief that the agency lacks the capacity or willingness to help.

The GAO and the other witnesses also testified that the lack of well developed assignments discourage volunteers from adequately immersing themselves in their host communities and thereby benefiting from the protections afforded to members of these villages and towns.

Finally, the witnesses noted that administrative impediments, such as limitations on terms of employment within the Peace Corps and worrisome changes within the Office of Medical Services, constrain Peace Corps employees from providing the best support possible to volunteers.

Mr. Chairman, the bill that we are considering today addresses these issues by establishing an Ombudsman within the agency to listen and attend to volunteer and employee concerns, by increasing the independence of the Inspector General of the Peace Corps to strengthen his ability to act as watchdog on behalf of volunteers, by requiring the agency to study and report to us on how it can improve programming for volunteers, and lastly by lifting the term limits for key offices within the agency.

I strongly support all of these provisions.

Mr. Chairman, we must not lose sight of the fact that Peace Corps volunteers for over forty years have been doing an extraordinary job as our development ambassadors to the most remote corners of this earth. And they have been doing their jobs under difficult and, at times, risky conditions—although not riskier than working in many urban settings in this country, including Dayton, Ohio.

As we consider measures to improve the health, safety, and security of our volunteers, we must be careful not to forge impenetrable shields around our volunteers which will make it harder for them to reach the young English student in Kazakhstan or the women's cooperative in Peru, or they the volunteers.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE NICK SMITH, A REPRESENTATIVE IN
CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF MICHIGAN

I want to thank Chairman Hyde for holding this hearing today on the safety and security of our Peace Corps volunteers. This is a difficult but important topic. I look forward to hearing our witness's testimony.

The Peace Corps represents a great tradition of American volunteerism and charity. Ed Sharkey, in my Jackson District office served from 1979 to 1981 in the Yemen Arab Republic. He said "Peace Corps workers go out into the world, work on behalf of others, and share our values. When Americans volunteer abroad, they have been among our most successful public diplomats. If the Peace Corps is to continue to achieve its mission, it must be better prepared to face the challenges of today." Ed suggested a visit to the website for fellow Peace Corps Volunteers brings home the real challenges that these American volunteers face today. He encouraged passage of Chairman Hyde's legislation.

At home, we have begun to respond to threats to our homeland. We must also prepare our Peace Corps volunteers to respond when they are abroad. The Peace Corps will have to train its volunteers to deal with the reality of violence in the field. The Peace Corps must also be reorganized to face today's security challenge. Like all of our agencies, it must be more flexible, more efficient, and more aware of the context in which it operates.

Again, I would like to thank the Chairman for holding this hearing today. Many of the stories that we will hear about the Peace Corps are tragic. However, it is because of these tragedies that we must act to improve and make changes to this organization.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE EARL BLUMENAUER, A REPRESENTATIVE
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF OREGON

The Peace Corps is a critical part of American diplomacy. I hope that this hearing, in addition to helping ensure the safety and security of Peace Corps volunteers, draws attention to the great work done by the Peace Corps program and its thousands of volunteers each year. As I visit other countries, I am continually and deeply impressed by the commitment and contributions of Peace Corps volunteers of all ages.

The Peace Corps provides the opportunity to large numbers of Americans, both young and old, to serve their country as ambassadors of peace, understanding, and goodwill. This is in addition to the very important and concrete work that Peace Corps volunteers do to assist people through development and education projects, as well as build cross-cultural bridges between the United States and diverse other societies. I believe that it is a profound statement about our American ideals that we provide the opportunity for those who choose to serve their country to do so by assisting others.

This is a program that richly deserves continued funding and attention from Congress. I thank the Peace Corps volunteers and alumni for their service and I thank the Committee for its work to keep them safe and secure.

THE DIRECTOR OF THE PEACE CORPS
WASHINGTON, D.C.

May 25, 2004

The Honorable Henry Hyde
Chairman
Committee on International Relations
U.S. House of Representatives
Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for your March 30 and April 15 letters regarding my testimony on "Safety and Security of Peace Corps Volunteers" before the Committee on March 24, 2004. I was delighted to testify regarding the important steps the Peace Corps has taken to maximize the security and minimize the risks for Volunteers serving abroad.

Below please find our agency's responses to each of the questions outlined in the two letters. Where appropriate, responses to similar questions have been placed together.

- *What errors did the Peace Corps or its employees make with respect to the case of missing Peace Corps Volunteer Walter Poirier? Has the Peace Corps documented these errors and made any lasting management changes to ensure the errors are not repeated?*

The disappearance of Walter Poirier is a tragedy that weighs on the hearts and minds of the Peace Corps family. Unfortunately, we still do not know exactly what happened to Mr. Poirier and cannot make any final determinations until the case is closed. A timeline of events indicating the actions taken by the Peace Corps since the disappearance of Walter Poirier is attached for your review. It notes several pro-active steps, including two public awareness campaigns with rewards for information related to his disappearance.

Additionally, as I indicated in my testimony, given the current security environment in the world, I have made Volunteer safety and security my number one priority since taking office in February 2002. Based on my personal experience as a former public safety official, aided by the counsel of others in the agency, the recommendations and findings from the General Accounting Office's July 2002 report on Volunteer safety, and Volunteers in the field, the Peace Corps created and implemented numerous safety enhancements.

In 2002, I approved a reorganization that created a new Office of Safety and Security and increased by 80 people the number of full-time safety and security staff, ninety-five percent of whom are deployed overseas. Our agency established new implementation

guidance and compliance checks for Volunteer/Trainee Safety and Security (Manual Section 270). Manual Section 270 is the backbone of the Peace Corps' field-based safety and security systems and provides guidance and support to all agency personnel. In addition, comprehensive new standard operating procedures and a standardization of all posts' Emergency Action Plans (EAPs) were created. As part of the new operating procedures, each post must test its EAP annually, update their emergency contact information monthly, and each Volunteer must complete a thorough contact form, called a Site Locator Form, within one month of arriving at post. This form includes multiple methods of communicating with the Volunteer and exact location information to reach the Volunteer by land, including Global Positioning System coordinates, where applicable. The Peace Corps also released comprehensive site development procedural guidance for use at post.

Lastly, the Peace Corps has strengthened the Volunteer out of site policy, which references traveling out of site for reasons other than vacation. It is imperative that Volunteers fill out the appropriate paperwork, provide their specific itinerary and appropriate contact information. Occasional trips from site allow Volunteers to learn more about the country, conduct business, and participate in projects of other Volunteers. However, another key component of Volunteer safety is community integration, so it is important for the Volunteer to spend time in the community. The rationale for the out of site policy is to know the Volunteer's whereabouts for safety and security purposes. In the event of an emergency when a Volunteer is not at his or her site, all communications methods available are employed to reach the Volunteer.

I am mindful of the need for continuous review of our safety and security policies given the current security environment, which includes new challenges placed on overseas organizations like the Peace Corps since September 11. These new policies and procedures are part of a continuous process of striving to improve our safety practices in order to maximize the security and minimize the risk to Volunteers.

- *Is there, or should there be, an agency policy (on a global or country-by-country level) that establishes the maximum span of control for Peace Corps in-country management staff? A GAO report noted that the excessive span of control of one manager contributed to the Peace Corps "losing track" of Mr. Poirier.*
- *What is the current ratio of Washington and field staff to volunteers? What ratio do you believe is necessary to permit good support of volunteers? How will any future Peace Corps expansion affect the proportion of staff to volunteers?*

Regarding the report on Mr. Poirier, the Peace Corps disagreed with the July 20, 2001, letter from the GAO's Office of Special Investigators to Representative Martin Meehan entitled "GAO-01-970R Missing Peace Corps Volunteer in Bolivia" in which the claim is made that the Peace Corps "lost track" of Mr. Poirier. In the July 26, 2001, letter from Acting Peace Corps Director Charles Baquet III, the Peace Corps objected "in the strongest possible terms, to the failure of the GAO to follow its normal protocols.... The failure to do so has resulted in a flawed investigative report that is unfair to the Peace

Corps, our employees, and our Volunteers.” A copy of this letter and further correspondence is attached for the record.

In addressing the issues of Volunteer supervision and the ratio of Peace Corps staff to Volunteers, it is important to start with the environment in which a Peace Corps Volunteer operates. The day-to-day supervisor for a Volunteer is his or her counterpart or another host country official. For some Volunteers, this could be a teacher or principal whom the Volunteer sees every day in class. For others, it might be a government official with whom the Volunteer meets twice a week to confirm and strategize next steps on a project. The Peace Corps has instituted practices to train host country counterparts in the work and policies of the Peace Corps. This enables the counterparts to keep the Volunteers focused, engaged, and safe as they work in the field. In addition to this regular interaction, Volunteers must stay in contact with Peace Corps officials, namely their in-country programming associate directors (APCDs), who help review their projects. The Volunteer’s counterpart or supervisor is also advised to regularly communicate with Peace Corps officials if any issues should arise.

The Peace Corps in-country staff includes management, medical, administrative, and programming staff and varies from country to country, given a country’s size, infrastructure, and geographical layout. For instance, the islands of Vanuatu have different staffing challenges than the vast expanse of Mongolia. In looking at establishing staff-to-Volunteer ratios, it is important to maintain this post-specific flexibility so that programs are shaped to meet the on-the-ground needs of each Peace Corps country.

As programs are established, however, or host country needs require additional Volunteers, the Peace Corps uses the annual Integrated Planning and Budget System (IPBS) process to outline the appropriate staff levels necessary to provide a quality experience for an increase in the number of Volunteers. Each post’s IPBS plan is generated in the field, receives careful review by offices at headquarters, and takes growth and staff-to-Volunteer ratios into account.

- *Peace Corps staff monitoring, including personal visits to volunteer work and home sites, are infrequent and brief. What are your views regarding the Peace Corps possibly increasing the number of staff as a proportion of the volunteer totals in order to ensure closer oversight and resolution of individual volunteer problems?*

Earlier this year, the Peace Corps formalized its worldwide guidance that recommends a minimum of two site visits during the first year (including one visit within the first three months) and one visit during the second year. In addition to these minimum guidelines, each post develops country-specific standards on the timing and frequency of site visits that reflects the location and placement of each Volunteer in-country. While the APCDs—who oversee individual Volunteer programming—may have the most regular contact, Volunteers may also be visited by Peace Corps Medical Officers, Safety and Security Coordinators, or the Country Director. Where applicable, Volunteer Leaders also make

site visits, and act as mentors to integrate new Volunteers as they adapt to their sites. Aside from visiting Volunteers at their sites, in-country staff interact with Volunteers when they come to the Peace Corps Office to conduct business, gather for their in-service training, or attend other events over the two-year period. Overall, the Peace Corps has guidance in place to promote frequent visits and contact with Volunteers, recognizing that each country must establish its own schedule, reflecting the geography and infrastructure of the country.

- *Cell Phones: Many volunteers now purchase and carry their own cell phones. What are the pros and cons on whether the Peace Corps should issue phones to all volunteers in order to ensure communication in cases of emergency?*

An essential part of the Volunteer safety and security framework is communication, and the Peace Corps makes use of appropriate technology to facilitate communication with Volunteers. Cell phones, satellite phones, and global positioning system technology is used where appropriate and available. In regions of the world where the telecommunications revolution has transformed the area, cell phones may be widely prevalent in the local population and therefore available for Volunteer use. However, in some countries, there is little or no infrastructure to support cell phone communication and their use is virtually non-existent. Volunteers use the most common communications methods of the local community to keep in touch with family, friends, and Peace Corps staff.

In countries where cell phones are reliable, readily available, and inexpensive, almost all Volunteers purchase them on their own. The cost of owning a phone is included in the Volunteers' monthly living allowance. In these countries, Volunteers are best able to secure a cell phone at the local level through appropriate channels. In these cases, the Peace Corps is able to add the cell phone number to the list of emergency contact numbers for Volunteers as part of the Site Locator Form. During tests of the EAPs or in emergency situations, cell phones with reliable coverage have been very useful.

However, in some countries, having a cell phone could potentially be a security risk to the Volunteer, since he/she may stand out as an individual owning items of economic value and be targeted. Additionally, if cell phones were universally provided--regardless of reliability, cost, and appropriateness--Volunteers could come to rely on cell phones to the exclusion of personal contacts in the community. This could provide a false sense of security and prevent the Volunteer from building alternative communications methods--essential in an emergency.

- *Your written testimony declares that "all 71 Peace Corps posts have established a safety and security coordinator in country to oversee Volunteer safety issues in the field." What are the minimum requirements to serve as a Peace Corps "safety and security coordinator?" Does the Peace Corps hire non-American citizens for this position? Of the 71 safety and security coordinators mentioned in your testimony, how many of them are American citizens? How do such*

individuals liaise with Embassy Regional Security Officers? Doesn't the lack of American citizenship hamper their ability to receive threat information through embassy channels?

The Peace Corps Country Director, a U.S. citizen, is the official charged with the ultimate responsibility of Peace Corps Volunteers' safety and security at post, and is therefore the primary recipient of security or threat information coming from the U.S. Embassy. The Country Director appropriately maintains high-level contact with the Ambassador, Regional Security Officer (RSO), and others. In fact, the Country Director is a member of the Embassy's Emergency Action Committee and is fully briefed during times of crises or increased alert. The Country Director tasks the in-country staff to perform the security related functions required to adequately prepare for any routine or emergency safety situation.

The Safety and Security Coordinator provides logistical and administrative support to senior staff at post on safety and security matters. Manual Section 270 (related to safety and security) requires posts to maintain up-to-date information, such as accurate site locator forms, site history forms, training components, site visit verification and reports, and assault incident reports. The Safety and Security Coordinator must be able to perform other functions, such as coordinating with staff during the testing of the EAPs and the appropriate recording and dissemination of results--including any revisions. All Safety and Security Coordinators are hired as Personal Service Contracts (PSCs), and almost all (97 percent) are host country nationals. These host country nationals are often former law enforcement officials and can readily navigate the language, cultural norms, and laws of the host country.

Since the primary security need at post is for logistical support at the Peace Corps office and in the field, a host country national is completely competent--if not better--positioned to be effective on behalf of the Volunteer.

Additionally, each post is covered by a field-based Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer (PCSSO). These individuals act as security consultants for Country Directors and regional security staff at every post. They must be U.S. citizens and maintain strong working relationships with the Embassy's Regional Security Officer.

- *Did the Peace Corps initially comply with the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act with respect to the Dayton Daily News investigation? Why did it require a lawsuit in Federal Court before the Peace Corps provided documents pursuant to such requests for information? Has the Peace Corps changed the manner in which it responds to FOIA requests?*

The Peace Corps made every effort to respond in a timely manner to the 44 FOIA requests that it received from the *Dayton Daily News*. The Peace Corps made it a goal to be as open and responsive to the *Dayton Daily News* as possible. These requests sought documents from Peace Corps' 136 current and previous posts all over the world and

requested records regarding numerous incidents that happened over 30 years ago. The efforts to locate, compile, collate, review, redact, and copy the documents requested took a great deal of time and resources. The Peace Corps was also required by law to be extremely careful about the documents it was producing, as some involved serious crimes and assaults against Peace Corps Volunteers and thus, had to be painstakingly reviewed and information redacted for privacy reasons.

When these requests occurred, the Peace Corps immediately made the decision that the volume of requests could not be handled in the normal manner. In June 2002, well before the lawsuit was filed in November 2002, the Peace Corps began the process of recruiting and eventually hiring two full-time FOIA Officers. As this decision to hire additional personnel well predated the lawsuit, it is not accurate to say that it required a lawsuit to get the Peace Corps to respond to the FOIA requests.

Once these FOIA Officers were hired, the Peace Corps responded to every *Dayton Daily News* FOIA request within the 20 business days required by law, and in many cases, responses were made in expedited fashion.

In total, the Peace Corps produced over 11,000 pages of documents and three computer databases to the *Dayton Daily News* in response to the over 40 FOIA requests. In fact, out of more than 40 FOIA requests by the *Dayton Daily News*, only four requests were named in the lawsuit. Only one database and 155 pages were produced by the Peace Corps in response to the lawsuit. The other 10,000 plus pages were released in the due course of processing the FOIA requests, totally unrelated to the litigation. It is also important to note that the lawsuit filed by the *Dayton Daily News* was dismissed with prejudice by the Court after all parties acknowledged that the Peace Corps had responded fully to the four FOIA requests at issue in the case, with no relief being given to or finding in favor of the *Dayton Daily News*.

The Peace Corps has not changed the manner in which it responds to FOIA requests, but simply now has the resources to accommodate all requests, including the very demanding and numerous requests made by the *Dayton Daily News* or others.

- *Based on the Peace Corps' assertion that the safety of volunteers is "an overarching priority," does it still make sense to double the number of volunteers to 14,000 by 2007, as suggested by the President? Will it be possible to do so in a safe manner?*
- *How much unmet demand exists for volunteers in other countries? Is demand sufficient to allow an expansion of the Peace Corps to 14,000 volunteers, all with useful assignments? What skills are in demand? What are the most common requests for skills that the Peace Corps has been unwilling or unable to provide?*

The Peace Corps is pleased to be on a pathway for growth. However, since the amounts provided in the appropriations process for the past two years have fallen significantly short of that needed to meet the goal of doubling the number of Volunteers, we are

pursuing the strongest growth possible within the constraints of our resources while staying focused on safety and security and preserving the quality of the Volunteer experience.

On September 30, 2003, we achieved a 28-year high of 7,533 Volunteers in the field. Americans want to serve, and more and more countries want to establish or re-establish Peace Corps programs.

The Peace Corps will not compromise its overarching priority of safety and security as we seek to increase the number of Volunteers in the field. Prior to entering or re-entering a new country, an in-depth country assessment is always conducted. Each country assessment includes a thorough review of the following six areas: safety and security, programming, medical and health care issues, administrative and financial functions, recruiting, and a country history.

Growth demands are continually balanced by a graduated expansion of the safety infrastructure. A vigilant review of safety and security measures will always be conducted alongside quality site selection and programming for all Volunteers, regardless of their country of service.

Furthermore, there is significant demand for the creation and expansion of Peace Corps programs. Since the President's State of the Union Address in January 2002, over 30 countries have requested Peace Corps programs, 24 country assessments have been conducted, and the Peace Corps has entered or re-entered 14 countries. The Peace Corps only enters or re-enters countries at the request of the host government and after completing a comprehensive assessment, which, as noted, includes a review of the development of Volunteer assignments.

Additionally, the Peace Corps has great potential to optimize the placement of new Volunteers in countries where Peace Corps programs currently exist. Through its planning process, all Peace Corps posts evaluate their opportunities for growth, taking into consideration overall agency policies and host country requests--such as increasing the number of Volunteers in HIV/AIDS prevention and training programs, maximizing opportunities to enter or re-enter Muslim countries, or focusing greater attention on Youth Development. In some cases, the need is to increase the number of Volunteers in an already established program. In others, it may mean reaching out to a new region within an existing country or establishing a long-term project in a new sector.

Thus, between new countries entries, re-entries, and growing programs at current posts, there is sufficient demand to expand to 14,000 Volunteers over the course of time, given appropriate circumstances and funding. As previously indicated, while the Peace Corps is pleased to be placing more Volunteers in the field, recent funding levels have fallen short of the amounts needed to expand to 14,000 Volunteers by Fiscal Year (FY) 2007. The Peace Corps' current strategic plan under the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) calls for growth to 11,250 Volunteers by FY 2008, provided that the Peace Corps receives the requested appropriation for FY 2005 and subsequent years.

To ensure that the Peace Corps is able to plan for the desired growth, the agency uses the Integrated Planning and Budget System (IPBS) as its primary strategic planning mechanism, which is consistent with the planning process defined by GPRA. It features a multi-level strategic planning process that requires each Peace Corps office and sub-office to set goals, and establish measurable objectives and specific tasks--in essence, a performance plan--with related timelines. IPBS is based on a three-year planning cycle, and every Peace Corps office and overseas post is required to define its goals and objectives and to develop a strategic plan and budget that will enable the office to meet the end result. These plans are based on projected levels of funding; however, they are adjusted accordingly if these levels are not realized through actual appropriations.

In concert with IPBS, the Peace Corps also requires overseas posts to develop plans for their Volunteer projects that describe the goals, objectives, and life span of the project. There is an annual Project Status Review process, which is a comprehensive review of current programming to ensure maximum effectiveness. Each project's strengths and weaknesses are assessed, and the plan is reaffirmed or altered based on lessons learned in an iterative planning process. This review enables the Peace Corps to ensure that Volunteers have useful assignments and that their work feeds into the development goals of the host country.

Moreover, the Volunteer Delivery System--the continuous cycle that enables the Peace Corps to meet the requests of host countries and Peace Corps posts for suitable, trained Volunteers--is the agency's engine. There are certain skill sets in which the demand regularly exceeds the supply, such as French-speakers, teachers, and those with highly technical qualifications. Countries continually seek scarce skills such as agro-foresters, advanced health Volunteers, and advanced business Volunteers. Additionally, certified or experienced teachers are extremely scarce world-wide, and countries are increasing their requests for experienced teachers, often in math, science, and English. However, the Volunteer Delivery System is a dynamic process and adapts to the changing supply and demand elements.

For instance, in an effort to supply more technically skilled Volunteers, the Peace Corps has entered into a partnership to reach community colleges throughout the United States. While four-year institutions have been the main source for Peace Corps Volunteers over the years, the Peace Corps is now working with the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) to expand recruiting activities at community colleges. Assignment areas, such as health and information technology, can often be filled by community college graduates who are specifically trained in these skills. Because many community college graduates have work experience when they complete their degrees, they offer maturity and specialized skills, which are valuable assets to the Peace Corps.

Overall, the Peace Corps has important planning mechanisms in place to ensure that the Peace Corps grows in a way that preserves the quality of the Volunteer experience and focuses on safety and security. This ensures that Volunteers have meaningful jobs, have

relationships with partner organizations and host communities, are meeting host country development goals, and are maximizing their safety and security.

- *Peace Corps recently entered into an agreement with the National Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT) of Mexico to prepare for the first ever Peace Corps program to that country, which will assign Peace Corps volunteers to work in partnership with CONACYT in the areas of information technology, small business development, and science and technology. What other innovative cooperation agreements could the Peace Corps consider that would facilitate the establishment or re-establishment of programs in countries like Brazil, India, and other nations that are hesitant to invite the Peace Corps, or other development agencies, into their respective borders for reasons of perception?*

The Peace Corps will enter Mexico for the first time in 2004. The Peace Corps and the Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología, National Council on Science and Technology, (CONACYT) of Mexico signed a Partnership Accord on June 10, 2003. The agreement was formalized at a signing ceremony at the Mexican Embassy in Washington, D.C., on November 12, 2003. The Peace Corps began exploring the possibility of entering Mexico after U.S. President George W. Bush and Mexican President Vicente Fox announced the "Partnership for Prosperity" initiative during their summit in September 2001. Peace Corps Volunteers assigned to Mexico will work in partnership with CONACYT in the areas of information technology, small business development, and science and technology. A Peace Corps assessment team has worked closely with CONACYT to select sites and determine the best way to utilize the Volunteers. The Peace Corps will send its first group of approximately 15 to 20 Volunteers to Mexico in 2004.

The Peace Corps' entry into Mexico is a carefully crafted partnership that reflects the unique relationship between the United States and Mexico. The focus of the program is on cultural exchange and meeting the specific need for more highly technical Volunteers. This is a pilot approach that preserves the core mission of the Peace Corps but is qualitatively different than some long-established programs in other countries.

As the Peace Corps works with countries in which there is a concern regarding the image of the Peace Corps as a type of 'development agency,' the Peace Corps has expressed the importance of its broad mission, of which one goal is to transfer needed skills to the people of interested countries. However, the goals of promoting a better understanding of Americans on the part of people served and promoting a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans are key components to every Peace Corps program. Thus, the Peace Corps will assess the results of this innovative partnership with Mexico when looking at other areas of the world in which unique collaboration would be required to make a Peace Corps program a reality. The results of the Peace Corps/Mexico program may serve as a model for future Peace Corps activities in countries or sectors in which the agency has not been as active. In each case, the key objective to contribute to the economic and social well-being of the people and the communities in which the Volunteers work.

- *As the Peace Corps seeks to expand, how would you view increasing the number of skilled Peace Corps volunteers who are assigned to work as United Nations Volunteers or with other development agencies?*

The Peace Corps has recognized the need for highly skilled Volunteers to address the growing demand for technically advanced assignments. In its current collaboration with the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) program, the Peace Corps is in a position to meet these needs through its ability to recruit Volunteers using the UNV database. These Volunteers have an average of 10-15 years of professional experience in their field of expertise. The Peace Corps continues to co-sponsor UNV assignments with technically advanced Volunteers to the extent that the Peace Corps' UNV budget allows. Although, with enhanced appropriated funds, the Peace Corps' UNV program could expand to accommodate the recruitment of UN Volunteers for assignments with Peace Corps, USAID, and other development agencies. As such, the UNV program is poised to aid the Peace Corps in its expansion efforts.

- *Could the Crisis Corps, which seeks to field qualified Returned Peace Corps Volunteers on shorter assignments, be utilized to a greater extent that it is currently?*

Since it was founded in 1996, Crisis Corps has proven to be an asset to the Peace Corps by placing more than 550 Crisis Corps Volunteers (CCVs) in 36 countries worldwide. CCVs are placed in assignments that are uniquely suited to returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs), but are not appropriate as two-year Peace Corps Volunteer assignments. Crisis Corps was originally developed as a means of helping host countries deal with the reconstruction efforts following a natural disaster. However, in the last several years, Crisis Corps has expanded to include four additional program areas, Humanitarian Assistance, Disaster Preparedness and Mitigation, HIV/AIDS, and Post Conflict Relief and Reconstruction. Crisis Corps continues to develop assignments with posts that complement these five existing program areas.

It is Crisis Corps' ability to grow and develop to meet changing needs that makes the program a valuable tool for overseas posts and an exciting opportunity for RPCVs. Efforts undertaken to enhance the program's growth include launching an aggressive marketing campaign, which incorporated a new informational booklet directed toward potential overseas partners. Clear strengths of Crisis Corps are its adaptability and its innovative programming. Crisis Corps is poised for growth and will continue to serve the Peace Corps mission to the extent that funding allows.

- *What steps have been taken to meet the goal of opening more programs in countries with predominantly Muslim populations? To what extent have security concerns affected the effort to expand in Islamic countries? Do statistics show a great threat of physical or other violence against volunteers in Islamic countries? How would you characterize the safety and security of volunteers in these countries at present?*

The Peace Corps continues to support programs in countries with predominantly Muslim populations, namely, countries in the Sahel, North Africa, Middle East, and Central and South Asia. Three out of four of our new country entries in 2003 were in predominantly Muslim countries--Albania, Azerbaijan, and Chad--bringing our total program involvement from 14 nations in 2002 to 17 in 2004. We also re-entered Jordan and Morocco, increasing the total number of Volunteers working in countries with predominantly Muslim populations to over 20 percent. The Peace Corps' mission in these countries matches our efforts worldwide and continues to be important. Host communities are exposed to positive and personal images of Americans, and returning Volunteers share their new understanding of these different cultures with friends and family in the United States.

As is true throughout the world, our potential to expand into additional countries with Muslim populations is dependent on a written expression of interest from a senior host government representative, a positive in-country assessment, and available resources. The funding must be available to support administrative start-up, training, and Volunteer program support. The inviting country must meet safety and security criteria, including a stable operational environment; access to effective and reliable communications; available, safe, and affordable housing; access to essential services, such as health care and banking; and access to evacuation logistical support.

Likewise, expanding the number of Volunteers in any current country is influenced by resources, program opportunities, and safety and security considerations. Our research verifies that safety and security concerns are country specific and show no ethnic, religious, or regional pattern.

The Peace Corps tracks assault events, both major and minor, through a sophisticated data tracking system. In reviewing the data, there is no pattern of assault events indicating a difference in the safety and security of Volunteers in countries with significant Muslim populations versus other Peace Corps countries. In fact, the region with the highest rate of major assault events over the past five years is the region without predominantly Muslim populated countries.

Thus, based on our data, Volunteers serving in Sahel, North Africa, Middle East, and Central and South Asian countries are equally safe and secure as Volunteers world-wide. We monitor individual country situations carefully, and if a situation precludes Volunteers being able to continue their work and community interaction effectively, we reassess our presence in the country. We see no regional or ethnic patterns to these assessments.

- *How could the Peace Corps take greater measures during recruitment and training to weed out potentially irresponsible volunteers and such delinquent behavior as alcoholism or drug consumption? What is your view on pre-service psychological testing, for instance?*

Currently, the Peace Corps requires extensive background information from the applicant. This includes at least three references, an interview by a trained recruiter, a National Agency Clearance check, a complete medical assessment including any history of alcohol or drug use, and two suitability assessments, one during recruitment and one during placement. Among other criteria, the Peace Corps has further clarified the mental health review and suitability criteria. The information gathered during the application process helps the Peace Corps identify inappropriate behavior that would make a potential Volunteer unsuitable for Peace Corps service.

Since 2003, the Peace Corps has been working to strengthen our Volunteer support to minimize high risk behaviors. In addition, the agency has interviewed overseas Peace Corps Medical Officers (PCMOs) about Volunteer high risk behavior and potential underlying causes. This has led to the development of pre-service training modules focusing on managing adjustment, loneliness, and personal responsibilities. In Central Asia, the Peace Corps conducted Volunteer in-service and staff training on alcohol use and will be expanding the training to other countries. The agency has also been strengthening our in-country Volunteer Support Committees. The 2003 Continuing Medical Education programs world-wide focused on mental health and adjustment issues and extensive reference materials were prepared for PCMO use in-country.

Moreover, the issue of pre-service psychological testing dates back to the 1960s. During that time the Peace Corps gave psychological tests and hired full-time psychologists for use during the pre-service training period, which occurred in the United States prior to departure. Both were abandoned as being ineffectual, inappropriate, and counter-productive to preparing trainees for service. Recent academic research has not supported clearly defined criteria in determining successful international service, nor identified individuals--through testing--who would most likely have a long-term, positive experience in international work. Thus, we do not recommend psychological testing as an effective screening tool for the agency's purposes.

- *What measures are the Peace Corps taking to improve data collection and encourage volunteers to fully report problems?*

The Peace Corps Office of Safety and Security works to prevent crimes against Volunteers by ensuring that the Peace Corps has strong research, planning, training, and compliance systems in place. The newly hired research psychologist works to enhance the office's ability to track crime statistics, identify trends in criminal activity, and highlight potential safety risks to Volunteers. The office also continually evaluates the policies and structures that are put into place by the Peace Corps to protect Volunteers and to try to prevent them from becoming targets of crime.

In order to enhance policies, systems, and training to help prevent future Volunteer assaults, the Peace Corps designed the Assault Notification and Surveillance System (ANSS) in 1990 to provide data for internal tracking purposes. The Peace Corps had collected assault data before 1990, but not in a form that facilitated trend analysis. The ANSS system is set up to track the number of assault events (incidents) as a ratio to

Volunteer Years to allow for a statistically valid way in which to compare assault data. This is consistent with the method the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics accepts as an effective tool for trend analysis. While the data can be roughly broken down further to the number of individuals affected, rather than the number of assault incidents, it then loses its statistical significance for trend analysis and crime prevention purposes. Because the Peace Corps uses safety statistics to increase the understanding of trends so that training and policies can be adjusted and safety enhanced, the agency collects data in a manner that is consistent with this purpose. Moreover, improvements in safety reporting have allowed the Peace Corps to identify associated risk factors (time of day, location, alcohol use, means of transportation, etc.) and develop strategies to help Volunteers address them.

However, the Peace Corps approach to safety and security issues and crime prevention is one of constant improvement. The Peace Corps has taken steps to enhance our system for tracking assault incidents, including updating the assault reporting form to be more comprehensive and providing closed ended responses (in addition to the general narrative of the incident) for easier data analysis and tracking. Furthermore, the new system will expedite the information to headquarters via electronic means to enable the agency to more swiftly respond to reported crimes. An additional routine tracking and follow-up component is being added that will include the location and status of cases and final outcomes of prosecutions.

Although Volunteers may decline to report crimes for various reasons, the Peace Corps strongly encourage reporting and emphasize its importance during staging, pre-service training, and in other avenues. At the conclusion of the Volunteers' pre-service training, "trainees" must pass a series of core competencies before being sworn in as full-fledged Peace Corps Volunteers. These core competencies require trainees to demonstrate an understanding of issues such as personal safety strategies, dealing with unwanted attention, identifying risk factors and strategies for avoiding risk, and the importance of incident reporting.

One approach the agency will be implementing in the context of the new reporting system is to have a host country staff member--whenever possible--go to the Volunteer to gather information about the crime, instead of asking the Volunteer to travel to the local Peace Corps office. This small procedural change acknowledges the sensitive nature of an assault event, as well as honors the privacy of the individual by not forcing the Volunteer to travel into the Peace Corps office. The agency wants to improve reporting by providing Volunteers with as safe and supportive of an environment as possible beginning with the victim's first interaction with Peace Corps staff.

The launch of the new reporting system will require significant education and training of the staff and Volunteers. This is an opportunity to reiterate the importance of reporting crimes, as well as to specifically outline how the follow-up is handled, so that Volunteers do not withhold information based on misperceptions of the agency's processes. While positive longstanding effects of these changes may not be evident until subsequent years,

the education process for the new reporting system should show incremental steps towards improved reporting.

- *How can the Peace Corps improve its record on ethnic minorities and other under-represented groups within its volunteer and staff ranks?*

The Peace Corps continuously works to improve its outreach, awareness, and recruitment activities to increase the number of Volunteers of ethnic minorities and other under-represented groups who serve overseas. In June of 2002, Director Vasquez created a Diversity Task Force composed of members of the agency senior management and other staff. The Task Force has worked to identify ways to improve the agency's outreach to diverse ethnic minorities and to address issues that limit their participation in the Peace Corps. Some of the accomplishments of the Diversity Task Force include:

- A new recruitment advertising campaign that highlights diverse ethnic minorities in the Peace Corps, including specific materials showing the benefits of Peace Corps service debuted in September of 2003;
- The Peace Corps press office greatly expanded the dissemination of press releases to a current total of 150 ethnic media outlets;
- Many news stories have been generated that highlight the diversity of Peace Corps staff and Volunteers; and
- At meetings with national leaders of various ethnic minorities, the Peace Corps has discussed its efforts to increase the diversity of the agency and to ask for their involvement in important outreach opportunities.

To this end, the Peace Corps has made some progress in the last few years towards achieving its goal of increasing the diversity of applicants. For instance, the Peace Corps has experienced an increase in the number of Volunteers of ethnic minority groups recruited per year from 612 in FY 2000 to 661 in FY 2003.

In addition, the Peace Corps Office of Diversity Recruitment, which is part of the Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection, is dedicated to working with the 11 Regional Recruitment Offices to increase the number of diverse applicants. This office employs a variety of strategies, including attending national conferences focusing on diverse groups such as African American, Hispanic Americans, Asian/Pacific Americans, Indian/Native Americans, and older Americans. Diverse outreach activities also include marketing the Peace Corps brand to inner-city high school students to increase awareness of the Peace Corps as a viable post-undergraduate opportunity, as well as conducting Internet-based advertising of Peace Corps assignments to various Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Hispanic Serving Institutions. Lastly, each regional office created a Diversity Liaison point of contact to increase the dialogue and the sharing of recruitment best practices between the recruiting offices and headquarters. The Diversity Liaisons coordinate, enhance, and increase the number of diversity related recruitment activities at the regional level and train new recruiters in diversity recruitment.

Furthermore, the Peace Corps' Center for Field Assistance and Applied Research has developed a "Diversity Starter Kit" that is used in pre-service training to better educate Volunteers about American diversity and constructive coping and support strategies for use during their time in the field. With this training, diverse Volunteers--and those supporting them--are better prepared to build positive Volunteer experiences. When diverse Volunteers return home with exciting stories about life in the field and making a difference, it translates into recruitment of more Volunteers of diverse backgrounds.

Through intense outreach, positive Volunteer experiences, and efforts to eliminate barriers to service, the Peace Corps is striving to make the Peace Corps Volunteers represent the diverse face of America and to ensure that it is an opportunity available to all Americans.

- *What factors are inhibiting minorities from joining the Peace Corps at rates commensurate with their percentage of the U.S. population? What can the Peace Corps do to overcome these obstacles?*

There are a number of factors that currently inhibit minorities from entering into Peace Corps service. The factors range from economic issues to family concerns to a lack of knowledge about Peace Corps opportunities and the benefits of service. Some of the main factors and suggestions for overcoming them are listed below:

Factors

- Diverse populations may be less aware of the Peace Corps.
- Family expectations factor into and can influence the applicant's decision on serving in the Peace Corps.
- A 27-month commitment is perceived as a great deal of time away from family and friends.
- The benefits offered by the Peace Corps are often overshadowed by the benefits offered by other employers.
- Some diverse applicants are first-generation college graduates that may be economically burdened by student loans and feel pressure from their parents to obtain a job right after graduation from college to begin paying off the loans.
- Some members of ethnic minorities feel that they would prefer to work on improving their own neighborhoods rather than going overseas to help others.

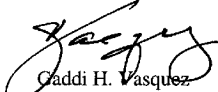
The Peace Corps can continue to work to overcome these obstacles in a number of ways. The agency can increase its marketing and recruitment efforts to strategically advertise the Peace Corps to diverse populations; continue to improve visibility in community colleges and inner city high schools; create additional marketing materials designed to specifically recruit older Americans, Hispanic American, African Americans, Asian/Pacific Americans, and Indian and Native Americans; evaluate current Peace Corps benefits offered; emphasize the career opportunities in public service, such as the Foreign Service, United States Agency for International Development, and the

Environmental Protection Agency, to which Peace Corps experience can lead; and continue to look for opportunities to provide college credit for Peace Corps service.

The work of the Diversity Task Force and others in seeking to break down barriers to service and overcome these obstacles is on-going, and will continue to be a priority for the agency.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the House International Relations Committee. Please let me know if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,



Gaddi H. Vasquez
Director

Attachments:

- Executive Summary and Chronology: Missing Peace Corps Volunteer Walter Poirier, February 2004
- July 26, 2001 Letter from Acting Peace Corps Director Charles Baquet III to GAO Comptroller General David Walker
- August 16, 2001 Letter from Acting Peace Corps Director Charles Baquet III to GAO Comptroller General David Walker
- October 15, 2003 Letter from Peace Corps Associate General Counsel H. David Kotz to Dayton Daily News Editor Jeff Bruce

**Executive Summary and Chronology
Missing Peace Corps Volunteer Walter Poirier
February 2004**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When Walter Poirier disappeared, he was a 23-year-old PCV volunteer serving in the Zongo Valley in Bolivia. Walter was assigned to the Community Tourism Development project, and he assisted selected communities in the Zongo Valley with tourism efforts. Peace Corps Volunteer Walter Poirier was declared missing on March 6, 2001 in La Paz, Bolivia. He was last seen by his counterpart, Teresa Chavez on February 22, 2001, in La Paz. Since that date, the U.S. Embassy, Peace Corps, and Bolivian authorities have maintained an extensive search and investigation into his whereabouts. This search included a physical search of his Peace Corps site in the Zongo Valley, areas in La Paz he frequented, as well as a national media campaign and reward for any information on his disappearance. As of the time of the update of this report, Walter is still missing. Country Director Howard Lyon checks in weekly with the local police officers who work with the RSO on this case to see if there are updates and to maintain their focus on this investigation. Walter's training group, Bolivia 25, closed service in November 2002. Walter's service has been extended by Director Vasquez until February 2005.

CHRONOLOGY

August 21, 2000	Walter began his service as a Trainee.
November 17, 2000	Walter was sworn in as a Volunteer.
January 28, 2001	Walter attended a Superbowl party at the Country Director's house, sent his last e-mail to his parents, and checked his account balance at the Banco Bisa ATM in La Paz.
February 22, 2001	Walter visited the offices of the Alcaldia in La Paz in the morning looking for Teresa Chavez. He returned 8 hours later and met with Teresa for 30 minutes. Teresa reported that they discussed the lack of progress he had made on his project in Zongo. THIS IS THE LAST CONFIRMED SITTING OF WALTER.
March 4, 2001	Walter Poirier's mother, Sheila Poirier, contacted the Peace Corps/Bolivia Duty Officer to express concern that she has not heard from her son in 2-3 weeks. The Duty Officer indicated that she would contact Walter in his site that day (Sunday), and, if unable to make contact, Peace Corps would check on Walter the following day.
March 5, 2001	Peace Corps staff attempted to contact Walter via radio at his site in the Zongo Valley, which had no telephone access. When there was no response, Peace Corps staff traveled to the Valley to attempt to locate Walter that same day.
March 6, 2001	Walter was officially declared a missing person when Country Director notified the United States Embassy's Regional Security Officer, who notified Bolivian authorities of Walter Poirier's status as a missing person.
March 6, 2001	The U.S. Embassy and Peace Corps, in collaboration with the Bolivian national police and search and rescue professionals from local fire departments, mobilized an extensive search and rescue effort in the Zongo Valley and an in-depth investigation into the disappearance. The U.S. Embassy also notified all five neighboring countries by cable about Poirier's disappearance. On March 6, 2001, the U.S. Embassy and Peace Corps also initiated a sustained mass media appeal on Walter Poirier's disappearance. This campaign consisted of paid television announcements, radio announcements, and nearly 1,500 flyers were distributed nationwide.
March 9-23, 2001	Peace Corps HQ staff traveled to Bolivia to provide counseling and support to Peace Corps staff, volunteers, and trainees. He traveled to four Peace Corps regional offices to meet with volunteers.

March 10-17, 2001	Peace Corps Regional Security Officer (RSSO) was sent to Bolivia to provide assistance to the search efforts. A trained search and rescue expert and former Marine, the RSSO worked with Bolivia and U.S. authorities on this case.
March 16-28, 2001	Peace Corps Inspector General Investigator visited Bolivia to provide assistance in the investigation.
March 19, 2001	The U.S. Embassy and Peace Corps offered a \$10,000 reward for information on this case via posters (3,800 distributed) and via the Bolivian press. Throughout the investigation, the U.S. Embassy publicized a 24-hour information hotline to receive any information on this case.
April 2001	The Federal Bureau of Investigation sent five investigators to Bolivia, who conferred with local investigators, the U.S. Embassy, and Peace Corps. On April 27, FBI agents briefed the U.S. Ambassador and Country Director. Their assessment was that the search and investigation had been "thorough, professional and profound" by all the agencies involved. They also indicated that Peace Corps and the Embassy had been very cooperative, and the Bolivian investigators had gone well beyond what might even have been done under similar circumstances in the U.S.
May 12-June 23, 2001	A media campaign was launched to coincide with Mrs. Poirier's visit to Bolivia which took place in June 2001.
March 10, 2002	A renewed public affairs campaign by Peace Corps marked the one-year anniversary of the disappearance of Walter Poirier began. Peace Corps increased the reward from to \$10,000 to \$25,000. This campaign included the circulation of a new poster and reflected the increase in the reward.
December 1, 2002	Another media campaign was launched in various media outlets throughout Bolivia.
March 17, 2003	The CD Lyon did seven interviews in various Bolivian media outlets to mark the two-year anniversary of Walter's disappearance.
February 3, 2003	Director Vasquez extended Walter's service through February 15, 2004.
June 23, 2003	Director Vasquez notified the Poiriers that Peace Corps Bolivia would return all of Walter's belongings to them.
December 11, 2003	Director Vasquez extended Walter's service until February 15, 2005.
January 2004	Peace Corps HQ asked CD Lyon for his guidance on next steps. He advised there were no new leads and that a possible national strike/blockade was planned for mid-February so he didn't think that it would be a good time to raise Peace Corps profile in the Bolivian media. He recommend PC keep a low profile due to the security situation and advised against drawing attention to a large award money for a missing U.S. citizen.

**Mr. Vasquez was sworn-in as the 16th Peace Corps Director on February 15, 2002

THE DIRECTOR OF THE PEACE CORPS
WASHINGTON, D.C.

July 26, 2001

Mr. David M. Walker
Comptroller General
U. S. General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

Re: GAO-01-970R

Dear Mr. Walker:

The Peace Corps has acquired a copy of a July 20, 2001, GAO letter to U.S. Representative Martin T. Meehan (D-Massachusetts) entitled "The Peace Corps Failed to Properly Supervise Missing Volunteer and Lost Track of Him." (GAO-01-970R). This copy was provided to us by a representative of the media in the late afternoon on Friday, July 20, 2001. As of this date, the agency has still not received an official copy from your office. Obviously, we have been denied an opportunity to review a draft of the report. We believe that procedural fairness to the Peace Corps and to its employees and Volunteers requires that immediate action be taken to retract the letter and to remove it from the GAO Web site until such time as the agency has had an opportunity to comment on the report.

We object, in the strongest possible terms, to the failure of the GAO to follow its normal protocols, including adherence to the standards established by the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency, throughout the course of the investigation referenced in a July 20th letter to the Inspector General of the Peace Corps. The failure to do so has resulted in a flawed investigative report that is unfair to the Peace Corps, our employees, and our Volunteers. Because the report's factual accuracy was never validated through an opportunity to comment by the Peace Corps as is required under normal protocols, it conveys the impression, to an informed reader, of a decided lack of thoroughness and impartiality on the part of OSI.

Based on our understanding of these protocols and how the investigation was conducted, we conclude that the following protocols were not followed, and that there was no compelling investigative reason for failing to observe them:

1. Official notification to the agency of the investigation

The agency head was never formally notified of the purpose and scope of the proposed GAO visit to Bolivia. While there are some circumstances in which it

Mr. David M. Walker
 July 26, 2001
 Page 2

would be inappropriate for OSI to notify an agency that it intended to travel to an overseas office to review a given aspect of its operations, we do not believe that this was one of them. In our experience, it is routine for an executive branch agency to receive a courtesy notice, addressed to the head of the agency, of a planned visit by the GAO.

In this situation, it was only at our insistence that a letter was issued at all, after the agency learned of the intended visit. Instead of being sent to the head of the agency, however, it was addressed to the Inspector General.

Further, in this letter, the stated scope of the proposed investigation is limited to determining the actions taken by the Peace Corps and the American Embassy to locate Mr. Poirier and to establish a time line in the case. The report, however, fails to mention establishing a time line as one of the reasons for sending OSI investigators to Bolivia. Instead, it sets a very different additional purpose of determining whether the Peace Corps had failed to properly supervise Mr. Poirier's activities. Had we been properly notified of the actual purpose and scope of the investigation, we could have provided OSI with pertinent agency administrative procedures and policies to assist in the investigation. If your investigators did obtain them through some other channel, the report does not reflect this, nor does it indicate the investigators were aware of any such procedures. We request an explanation as to why the agency head failed to be provided with formal notification of the investigation and why the description of the scope of the investigation provided to the Inspector General differs from that in the final report.

2. Obtaining agency comments

Consistent with protocols adopted to ensure that GAO's reputation for fairness and integrity is maintained, OSI is ordinarily required to adhere to all Congressional policies and protocols.¹ One such protocol requires GAO to obtain official comments from agencies and other directly affected parties.² The Peace Corps, along with those employees who may be subject to disciplinary action or even prosecution based on the report's factual findings, should have been given an opportunity to comment on the report. This in turn would have given your office an opportunity to validate the factual accuracy of the information gathered and to consider other relevant facts before publication. We intend to provide you with formal comments for the record after we have fully reviewed the report.

It is in the interests of fairness to this agency, as well as to the GAO, that the report be recalled and removed from the GAO Web site pending your receipt and review of our formal comments. We request that this be done immediately. If our comments do not

¹ "GAO's Congressional Protocols," November 2000, GAO-01-145G, p. 15.

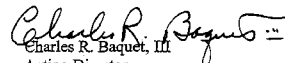
² *Ibid.*, p. 11

Mr. David M. Walker
July 26, 2001
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result in a revision of the report, we would expect them to be associated with the report when it is reposted on the Internet.

If you need any further information or have any questions, please contact me at 202-692-2100. I am also available to meet with you and your staff should you wish to discuss this agency's concerns and our request for you to take corrective action by removing the report from the GAO Web site.

Sincerely,


Charles R. Baquet, III
Acting Director

cc: Robert H. Hast, Managing Director
Office of Special Investigations
GAO

THE DIRECTOR OF THE PEACE CORPS
WASHINGTON, D.C.

August 16, 2001

Mr. David M. Walker
Comptroller General
U.S. General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Re: GAO-01-970R

Dear Mr. Walker:

On July 26, 2001, I wrote to convey my serious concerns about the manner in which the GAO's Office of Special Investigation (OSI) conducted and reported on its investigation that resulted in the letter to U.S. Representative Martin T. Meehan (D-Massachusetts) entitled "The Peace Corps Failed to Properly Supervise Missing Volunteer and Lost Track of Him." In my earlier letter, I stated my strong objections to the fact that OSI did not provide the Agency with adequate official notification of the investigation and, contrary to the GAO's normal protocols, did not provide the Agency with an opportunity to review the letter and provide comments on it before it was issued to the press and placed on the GAO's website. I noted that OSI's failure to follow the proper procedures had resulted in a flawed report that conveyed the impression of a decided lack of thoroughness and impartiality on the part of OSI. I requested that the GAO recall and remove the letter from its website until the Peace Corps had an opportunity to review the results of their investigation and provide our formal comments.

We have now had the opportunity to undertake a thorough review of the allegations contained in the OSI letter. Our review has confirmed our initial belief that the OSI's investigation was flawed and that the most significant factual findings contained in the letter are inaccurate. In light of our findings, I believe that the letter's continued presence on the GAO website and its continued dissemination by other means would be highly irresponsible, a position that I am prepared to state publicly should the GAO fail to retract the letter and remove it from its website immediately, or revise the letter consistent with my comments herein. If the GAO does not intend to retract or revise the letter, then I ask that my letter be appended to the OSI letter as the Peace Corps' official response.

1. The Allegations that the Associate Peace Corps Director Admitted to Lying.

Perhaps the most serious allegation contained in the OSI letter is contained in the third paragraph of the third page of the letter. That paragraph addresses the "conflicting statements" made by the Associate Peace Corps Director (APCD) and the Bolivian project supervisor concerning whether the project supervisor had said that Mr. Poirier had

missed a scheduled meeting on March 2, shortly before the Peace Corps discovered that Mr. Poirier was missing. According to the OSI letter:

[w]e informed the U.S. Embassy and the FBI of the Associate Director's and the Bolivian project supervisor's conflicting statements. The FBI subsequently interviewed the Associate Director, and the FBI told us that he admitted that his statement to us and U.S. Embassy personnel that Mr. Poirier had missed a scheduled meeting with his Bolivian project supervisor had no basis in fact. The Associate Director told the FBI that he said Mr. Poirier had missed a March 2 meeting to deflect blame elsewhere because he felt responsible for not keeping a closer watch on Mr. Poirier.

Because of the seriousness of these allegations – that a Peace Corps employee had admitted lying to the FBI to hide his own culpability – we immediately conducted a thorough review to determine precisely what had happened and what, if any, Agency action might be called for. First, we recalled the APCD to Peace Corps Headquarters in Washington and discussed these and other allegations contained in the OSI letter at considerable length. The APCD denied having made the comments attributed to him in the above paragraph, and provided his own explanation for the “conflicting statements” made by him and by the Bolivian project supervisor concerning the supervisor’s March 2 telephone call, which we discuss further below. Though we found the APCD’s explanation more plausible than the account set forth in the OSI letter, we reserved judgment on the veracity of the APCD’s account in light of the fact that the OSI letter purportedly contained information provided directly to OSI by the FBI.

We then contacted the FBI to learn precisely what had been said. Specifically, we contacted the FBI’s lead investigator into the Poirier disappearance, who had spoken with the OSI investigators before they spoke with the APCD. The lead investigator informed us that the FBI never told OSI investigators anything resembling the comments contained in the above paragraph. In fact, quite to the contrary, the lead investigator informed us that it is FBI policy not to discuss the details of ongoing FBI investigations with employees of other federal agencies, and that he had received specific instructions from FBI Headquarters not to discuss the details of the case with the OSI investigators. He further stated that he had clearly explained this to the OSI investigators when they met with him in Chile before traveling to Bolivia, and that neither he, nor, to the best of his knowledge, anyone else, from the FBI had discussed any of the details of this case with the OSI investigators. The lead investigator emphasized that the APCD had never been mentioned in any discussion between himself and the OSI investigators.

I am deeply disturbed that GAO would allow a letter so damning of the Agency and one of its employees to be publicly disseminated despite containing wholly inaccurate allegations of such a serious nature. This serious misrepresentation of the facts alone clearly warrants immediate retraction of the letter, but also calls into question the accuracy of the entire report and the impartiality of the OSI investigators who prepared the report.

2. The Alleged "Conflicting Statements" by the APCD and Mr. Poirier's Project Supervisor.

As discussed above, the OSI letter's statement that the APCD "admitted" to the FBI that he had made a false statement concerning the March 2 telephone call from Mr. Poirier's project supervisor to deflect attention from his own culpability is demonstrably false. The APCD does not contest that he made different statements at different times concerning whether the project supervisor had stated on March 2 that Mr. Poirier had missed a meeting with her. As he freely admits, he told the GAO investigators that the project supervisor had stated that Mr. Poirier missed a meeting with her on that date, and later stated that this was apparently not the case. The reason for this, however, is not that the APCD had ever intentionally made a false statement that he was now changing, but because he met with Teresa Chavez after he had already been interviewed by the GAO and she advised him then that she had called him on March 2 to discuss Mr. Poirier's lack of communication with her, not to report that he had missed a previously scheduled meeting with her. Accordingly, when he subsequently met with the FBI, he repeated his new understanding, based on what he had learned from Ms. Chavez, i.e., she was calling to schedule a meeting to discuss Mr. Poirier's lack of communication, not to advise post that he had missed a meeting.

The OSI investigators should have pursued this matter further. Had they done so, they would presumably have discovered the basis for the discrepancies in the APCD's account, as we easily did, and would have seen that there was no basis for accusing the APCD of deliberate misrepresentation. Our findings regarding the discrepancies in the accounts of Ms. Chavez's call to post is as follows:

- We have determined that on March 5, 2001, the APCD called Ms. Chavez in response to her call to him on March 2, 2001, and to ask if she knew where Mr. Poirier might be. Ms. Chavez did not know Mr. Poirier's whereabouts and asked the APCD to remind Mr. Poirier that he needed to periodically update his work with her. When the APCD subsequently went to look for Mr. Poirier in the Zongo Valley, he was told by villagers that they had not seen Mr. Poirier and that he in fact had missed some scheduled community meetings. The APCD called back to post with the information regarding his call to Ms. Chavez and the missed meetings in the Zongo Valley.
- Once it became clear that Mr. Poirier was missing, PC/Bolivia verbally notified headquarters of this fact and followed up with a cable. Paragraph 2 of that cable states as follows:

On March 2 we were contacted by PCV Walter Poirier's counterpart Teresa Chavez. She was looking for Walter since he had not contacted her as scheduled. His parents also contacted us on Sunday, March 4th inquiring about

their son since he had not contacted them in three weeks. Additionally Walter did not show up for a scheduled meeting with his community on March 3. This behavior is extremely unusual for this Volunteer leading us to suspect that something might have happened to him.

- The wording of the above paragraph (which was reproduced verbatim in a cable sent by the Embassy to the Secretary of State and other regional embassies) led many people, including staff at headquarters, to conclude that Mr. Poirier had missed a scheduled meeting with his counterpart. This is understandable, since a Volunteer's counterpart is generally someone who is in the same community as the Volunteer. In addition, the APCD was told early on by the Country Director (who in turn believes she was told this by Bolivian investigators) that Ms. Chavez told investigators she was calling to tell us that Mr. Poirier had missed a meeting.¹ During the first week of the search for Mr. Poirier, it became an accepted fact, in both headquarters and PC/Bolivia, that Ms. Chavez had called post on March 2 to report that Mr. Poirier had missed a meeting with her. Once the APCD met with Ms. Chavez and learned from her that his understanding was mistaken, he then repeated the facts as clarified by Ms. Chavez, leading the OSI investigators to conclude the APCD had deliberately misled previous investigators.

3. The Country Director's Support for the OSI's Findings:

The OSI letter concludes its discussion of its investigation concerning the APCD's supervision of Mr. Poirier with a full paragraph indicating that the Bolivia Country Director agreed with the OSI's conclusion that the APCD had "failed to properly supervise Mr. Poirier and lost track of him." The letter states, on page 3, paragraph 5:

Both the Country Director and Deputy Country Director for the Peace Corps in Bolivia told us that the Associate Director was not keeping close enough contact with Mr. Poirier. The Country Director said no one followed up on Mr. Poirier's failure to turn in his locator form. When we told the Country Director that Mr. Poirier had turned in his locator form for the La Paz apartment on January 31, she said this was the first she heard of it. The Country Director also said that if the Associate Director had reason to believe that Mr. Poirier was not working and living in the Zongo Valley, he should have done something about it. She also said that if the Associate Director knew that Mr. Poirier was visiting La Paz or his project supervisor, he should have also known that Mr. Poirier was not

¹ In the absence of access to official transcripts of Ms. Chavez's remarks we are unable to determine what she actually said. It may very well be that a statement by her that Mr. Poirier should have been meeting with her more frequently was understood or recalled in subsequent conversations with the Country Director as suggesting Mr. Poirier had actually missed a scheduled meeting.

completing his out of site notification reports. The Country Director said the Associate Director should have corrected this situation.

We brought the Country Director to Headquarters in Washington to discuss these comments. In this discussion, the Country Director stated unequivocally that she did not believe the APCD had failed in any way to perform the duties of his position with respect to the supervision of Mr. Poirier. The Country Director stated that the OSI letter did not accurately reflect what she had told the OSI investigators and that she believed that her statements were misconstrued and resulted in assigning blame to the APCD. The Country Director stated that the Peace Corps Bolivia staff, including the APCD, had properly followed all procedures in the handling of Mr. Poirier prior to his disappearance. Her statement is supported by our own internal review of PC/Bolivia's policies and procedures.

4. The Conclusion that "the Peace Corps Failed to Properly Supervise Missing Volunteer and Lost Track of Him."

The foregoing points address major inaccuracies in the OSI letter which call into question the conclusions drawn in the letter. Based on these inaccuracies, I believe that the OSI letter should never have been released to the public. Beyond these issues, however, I believe the OSI letter as a whole reflects a more basic lack of understanding of the Peace Corps and its processes.

I should start by emphasizing the profound effect Mr. Poirier's disappearance has had on the Agency, not only in our continued concern for his whereabouts and the toll his disappearance has on his family and friends, but also on our internal scrutiny of all matters concerning the safety and security of Peace Corps Volunteers, and, more specifically, the handling of Mr. Poirier's case. As people who support the work of Volunteers every day – and are in many cases former Volunteers ourselves – we cannot help but be acutely aware of the challenges presented by placing Volunteers in the numerous and varied locations where the Peace Corps operates around the world. We are also very conscious of, and dedicated to, the core mission of the Peace Corps, which is to provide Volunteers with the wherewithal to operate independently in working with people in places which are, by definition, very different from what most Americans are accustomed to.

The OSI letter, and the interviews that led to that letter, reflect no attempt to understand the unique operations of Peace Corps.

a. The OSI letter consistently refers to the APCD as Mr. Poirier's "supervisor." An APCD is not the "supervisor" of a Peace Corps Volunteer as that term appears to be understood by the OSI investigators. Within Peace Corps, the APCD is part of a Volunteer support team, which also includes the Country Director (CD), the Programming and Training Officer (PTO), the Volunteer Coordinator (PCVC), and other members of the Peace Corps staff. On a day-to-day basis, the primary contact – and frequently the "supervisor" – for a Volunteer is the host country counterpart with whom

he or she works. More importantly, a critical aspect of Peace Corps is that, to a large extent, Volunteers supervise themselves in most of their day-to-day activities – and the vast majority of them would not have it any other way.

b. The OSI letter concludes that the APCD should have been aware that Mr. Poirier was out of his site and had not filed appropriate out-of-site notification forms, with the implication that, had the APCD been more vigilant concerning Mr. Poirier's failure to follow the rules, he may have detected Mr. Poirier's absence at an earlier date than he did. In fact, because Mr. Poirier's project involved work both in the Zongo Valley and in La Paz, neither the CD nor the APCD considered Mr. Poirier to be "out of site" when he was in La Paz, and therefore had no indication that Mr. Poirier was in violation of the out-of-site-notification rule. Moreover, to the best of the APCD's knowledge at the time Mr. Poirier was not in La Paz on any workday in February but was at his site and there was therefore no reason for the APCD to believe that Mr. Poirier was in violation of that policy at any time during the several weeks prior to Mr. Poirier's disappearance.

c. The OSI letter concludes that the APCD was negligent in not ensuring that Mr. Poirier's correct address in the Zongo Valley had been submitted on a locator form. The APCD does not, in fact, have any responsibility for locator forms, and it is puzzling why the OSI investigators insisted that he had a responsibility for the timely and accurate submission of these forms which he simply does not have. The APCD's responsibility for Volunteer housing consists of identifying appropriate, available housing for Volunteers close to their sites and providing Volunteers with sufficient information to enable them to follow through with obtaining housing. The APCD in this case not only identified appropriate housing for Mr. Poirier in the Zongo Valley, he accompanied Mr. Poirier to the Valley and showed him the housing. (Contrary to the OSI letter, the housing identified by the APCD was in fact available; all that was necessary was for Mr. Poirier to contact the owner of the house and make rental arrangements.) The APCD had every reason to believe that, when Mr. Poirier returned to the Valley to work on his project, he was living in the housing that had been identified for him. Moreover, had he been living in that house, his disappearance would have been more readily noticed by neighbors than disappearance from the much more isolated house in which Mr. Poirier chose to live, which had not been approved by Peace Corps for Volunteer use.


d. The OSI letter suggests that the APCD should have been in more regular contact with Mr. Poirier than he was, and that his failure to make more regular contact contributed to the length of time before Mr. Poirier's disappearance became known. The APCD had, in fact, heard from Mr. Poirier in a detailed e-mail dated January 29, which indicated that Mr. Poirier had moved to his Zongo Valley site and was moving forward with his project. The OSI letter states that the APCD said that this e-mail "concerned him" and that he attempted to contact Mr. Poirier on January 31, but then did not follow up on this attempt and that Mr. Poirier then "dropped off my radar screen." OSI letter, page 3, paragraph 4. As the APCD explained to the OSI investigators, however, his only "concern" about the January 29 e-mail concerned the source of funding for the project – he did not, as the OSI letter suggests, have concerns about Mr. Poirier's well-being, but to the contrary believed that the e-mail demonstrated that Mr. Poirier was functioning --

well in his site. The APCD also denies stating that Mr. Poirier "dropped off my radar screen," but states that, because he learned, when he sought out Mr. Poirier to discuss the e-mail, that Mr. Poirier had gone to the Zongo Valley and expressed an intention to remain there for several weeks, he did not feel the need to contact him during the next several weeks, a time period which is not unusual for a Volunteer to be out of contact with the Peace Corps office.

The APCD also noted, as did some of Mr. Poirier's fellow Volunteers, that Mr. Poirier was less inclined than some Volunteers to seek assistance from his APCD, and the APCD accordingly did not find it unusual when he did not hear from Mr. Poirier for an extended period of time. It must be emphasized that the written performance requirements for an APCD in Bolivia require that an APCD meet with newly-sworn Volunteers at their site once in their first three months of service and then once a year thereafter (in addition to the visit in the first three months). The CD has indicated that, in the case of Mr. Poirier, the APCD met that requirement.

In closing, let me reiterate my firm belief that the conclusions drawn by the OSI investigators are inaccurate and unfounded. Volunteer safety has always been our first priority and is taken very seriously. Based on our own internal review of events preceding the disappearance of Mr. Poirier and the ongoing search for his whereabouts, I have the utmost confidence that all staff in PC/Bolivia have been and remain firmly committed to the welfare of the Volunteers they support. I again ask that the OSI letter be rescinded or revised. If not, I expect that this letter will be associated with the OSI letter as the official response of the Peace Corps, given out with the OSI letter in the future, and placed on the GAO website.

Sincerely,


Charles R. Baquet III
Acting Director



October 15, 2003

Jeff Bruce, Editor
Dayton Daily News
45 South Ludlow Street
Dayton, OH 45402

Dear Mr. Bruce:

On behalf of the Peace Corps, we are bringing to your attention significant concerns we have about inaccuracies and misleading information that may be included in an upcoming story that *Dayton Daily News* reporter Russell Carollo is preparing about the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps has had extensive communications and interactions with Mr. Carollo and his associates for the past year and a half while this story was being investigated. Through these communications, we have become aware of inaccuracies. We bring these matters to your attention before the story has been finalized in an effort to ensure that a fair and accurate story will be published.

The following are examples of statements and assertions made to the Peace Corps by Mr. Carollo and his associates that are false and misleading. In mid-May 2003, Mr. Carollo submitted several graphic charts purportedly showing adverse trends in safety conditions for Peace Corps Volunteers. In a four-page letter dated June 12, 2003, the Peace Corps explained to Mr. Carollo that his graphics presented incorrect numbers and percentages throughout and frequently provided data out of its proper context. (See copy of June 12, 2003 letter attached herein.)

As of this date, the Peace Corps has received no response to this letter and no assurances that the graphics and analysis prepared by Mr. Carollo and his associates would be modified to provide an accurate statistical profile of the Volunteers' safety conditions. In a meeting on October 1, 2003, Mr. Carollo stated that he was aware of our "philosophical differences" with his graphics, but indicated that he would not change his approach. These are not merely "philosophical differences;" the graphics presented by Mr. Carollo are false and misleading.

On September 10, 2003, the Peace Corps was also provided slides for a presentation by *Dayton Daily News* expert Elliot Jaspin at the October 1, 2003 meeting. At least one of the slides was proven to be false. The slide purports to show the "results" of Mr. Jaspin's analysis, that "[t]he official [Peace Corps] report says there were 7 rapes in Guatemala when there were actually 9 - The same report says there were 11 aggravated assaults. There were really 13."

Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Headquarters
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In actuality, the Peace Corps' report does not state that there were 7 rapes, or 11 aggravated assaults. The Safety of the Volunteer 2002 (the report to which Mr. Jaspin refers in his slide) states very clearly that there were, in this case, 7 rape **incidents** or **events** and 11 aggravated assault **incidents** or **events**, which may encompass more than one individual rape or assault. The slide attempts to show that a misrepresentation has been made, but, in fact, Peace Corps represented the situation appropriately.

In addition, during the course of our October 1, 2003 meeting, it was acknowledged by Mr. Carollo that, contrary to Mr. Jaspin's analysis presented in his slide presentation and in light of the key purpose of the Peace Corps' database, to prevent future events as much as possible, the Peace Corps' method of recording assault or rape events for documenting rapes or assaults- rather than recording individual rapes or assaults - is more effective and has proven to be successful at Peace Corps. We have been consistent with this methodology over the 13 years that we have been tracking assault data and most recently, the Peace Corps shows a significant reduction in the rate of major sexual assault events in the past 7 years. We would sincerely hope that this acknowledgement would be made when the article is published.

Mr. Carollo has also incorrectly claimed to the Press Office and the Office of General Counsel on numerous occasions that the Peace Corps has not cooperated with him in his investigation. In addition, while Mr. Carollo has maintained to the Press Office and the Office of General Counsel that the Peace Corps' FOIA Office was not appropriately responsive to his numerous requests, the facts do not support this assertion.

- Peace Corps has spent over 3,000 person-hours in the past 18 months responding to requests for information from Mr. Carollo through FOIA, as well as through its Press and other offices. Much of this time was spent by senior staff members at the Peace Corps.
- Peace Corps has also opened its offices to Mr. Carollo, Mr. Jaspin, and others for lengthy interviews of its senior staff, including the Director of the Peace Corps, Gaddi H. Vasquez in May 2003, another meeting in July 2003, and a third meeting with senior staff, including the Deputy Director on October 1, 2003.
- While it is correct that initially the unprecedented number and breadth of Mr. Carollo's requests were more than the FOIA Office had, in total, ever managed in recent memory, and Mr. Carollo did file a lawsuit to compel responses to four of his nearly 40 FOIA requests, the initial delays in responding to his FOIA requests were quickly remedied, and the lawsuit was dismissed with prejudice in July by the federal court in Dayton, Ohio. Since November 4, 2002, when the Peace Corps hired a full-time FOIA Officer to respond to Mr. Carollo's multitude of requests, the Peace Corps' FOIA Office has responded to every FOIA request made by Mr. Carollo in a timely and fully responsive manner. The Peace Corps' FOIA Office has actually even agreed to produce documents well before the established FOIA deadlines at the request of Mr. Carollo, who stated on numerous occasions that his deadline for publishing the article was approaching. Mr. Carollo acknowledged this fact at the October 1, 2003 meeting. As it turned out, the deadlines for publishing the article were not accurate.

- In all, the Peace Corps has produced four computer databases and approximately 11,000 pages of documents to Mr. Carollo under FOIA.
- Peace Corps has also responded, and continues to respond in writing, to a series of requests for information made by Mr. Carollo during the course of his investigation. It should also be noted that when asked, no assurances were given that any of Peace Corps' answers to Mr. Carollo's questions would be incorporated into the story.

We are also attaching to this letter copies of the aforementioned three sets of Peace Corps responses to the questions posed by Mr. Carollo. We would ask that you review carefully these responses before the story is published to ensure the information in the story is accurate. For example, Mr. Carollo stated at the October 1, 2003 meeting that he spoke with the Ukrainian prosecutor involved in the Brian Krow case. This prosecutor informed him that the prosecutor's office had not concluded that Mr. Krow's death was accidental. In the Peace Corps' response to question no. 37 of Mr. Carollo's second set of questions, which refers to a September 15, 1999 final official report from that same prosecutor's office reflecting the conclusion which states that, having considered the medical examination and investigation materials, Mr. Krow had died as the result of an accident. Our own Office of Inspector General was also involved and confirmed the thoroughness of the investigation and subsequent findings.

We would also like you to be aware that as a direct result of Mr. Carollo's investigation, the Peace Corps was compelled to transfer a Country Director from her post because of concerns about her safety. Peace Corps Country Director Christine Djondo was carjacked in September 2001. The intent to publish Christine Djondo's story, including her name, became clear as the result of inquiries by Mr. Carollo, his associates, and a local Masotho reporter working with Mr. Carollo. Due to the public attention their research of the case garnered, Ms. Djondo felt unsafe for herself, her husband and two young children, as her attackers were now free in her community. As a direct result of these actions, Ms. Djondo felt compelled to leave her host country and requested a transfer to a different post.

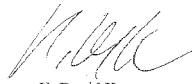
It should also be brought to your attention that some of Mr. Carollo's research methods for this story were disturbing. For example, Mr. Carollo provided misinformation to Paul Leveille, the father of deceased former Peace Corps Volunteer Kevin Leveille, in order to entice Mr. Leveille into providing authorization to Mr. Carollo to obtain documents relating to his deceased son. According to Paul Leveille, Mr. Carollo informed him that the only way Mr. Leveille would be able to obtain copies of documents pertaining to his son's death was if he authorized Mr. Carollo to seek them on his behalf. When Mr. Leveille was informed that this information was inaccurate, he retracted his authorization to Mr. Carollo. (See attached copy of retraction letter).

Finally, it is important to recognize that in the Peace Corps' 42-year history, more than 170,000 Americans have served in 136 countries, almost always under conditions of

hardship. The Peace Corps works in some of the least developed countries and in some of the most remote areas in the world. Health, safety and security risks are an unavoidable aspect of Volunteer service. Our challenge is to operate the Peace Corps in a way that minimizes risks and maximizes security, while also providing a meaningful experience for our Volunteers and their host communities - a challenge the Peace Corps has been successful in meeting. As situations and world events inevitably change, the Peace Corps will continue to adjust procedures and develop new systems and policies for safety and security that reflect the needs of the time. There is every indication that Mr. Carollo's research and stories may ignore these facts. It is our hope that this message will be communicated to your readers in a fair and balanced manner.

We sincerely hope that you seriously consider the above concerns and take whatever actions necessary to ensure that Mr. Carollo's story is accurate and unbiased. We would be happy to discuss these matters in more detail at your convenience.

Sincerely,



H. David Kotz
Associate General Counsel

cc: Ron Martin, Senior Editor, Cox Newspapers, Inc.
Brad Tillson, Publisher, Dayton Daily News
Steve Sidlo, Managing Editor, Dayton Daily News
Andrew Alexander, D.C. Bureau Chief, Dayton Daily News
John Erickson, Assistant Managing Editor/Projects and Government, Dayton Daily News
Russell Carollo, Special Projects, Dayton Daily News

STATEMENT OF PAUL LEVEILLE

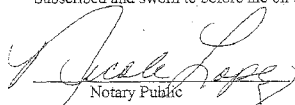
I, Paul Leveille, retract my May 1, 2002 authorization for Dayton Daily News reporter Russell Carollo to obtain documents concerning my son Kevin R. Leveille, a Peace Corps volunteer stationed in the Ivory Coast.

The May 1, 2002 authorization was based upon misinformation that I received from Mr. Carollo, who informed me that the only way for me to obtain this material was if it was requested through a news agency.

My family and I, therefore, retract our waiver and assert all privacy rights belonging to us with respect to any Peace Corps documents relating to Kevin R. Leveille.


PAUL LEVEILLE

Subscribed and sworn to before me on this 19 day of March 2003.


Notary Public

