

**STATEMENT OF GADDI H. VASQUEZ  
NOMINEE FOR DIRECTOR OF THE PEACE CORPS**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased and honored to appear before you today as President Bush's nominee to be the Director of the Peace Corps. I thank you for your willingness to hold this hearing and for all courtesies that have been extended to me. I would like to introduce to you my wife, Elaine and our son, Jason.

I would like to thank Senator Boxer, Congressman Cox for their kind and generous introductions as well as Congresswoman Sanchez who will speak later in the hearing. To have the support of these three great public servants is an extraordinary honor for me. I am also grateful for the bipartisan support that many members of the House and the Senate have expressed in support of my nomination.

I want to thank President Bush for his trust and confidence in honoring me with his nomination to lead the Peace Corps. I know the President firmly believes in and supports the mission of the Peace Corps. President Bush is a man of vision, and someone who understands the value and merits of the noble work the Peace Corps has advanced at home and abroad during the past forty years.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for your continued leadership on matters relating to the Peace Corps. You and the six members of the House of Representatives who are Returned Peace Corps Volunteers are shining examples of public service and the passion that Peace Corps service can bring to an individual's life.

I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge the work of the men and women of Peace Corps who have served during this transition period. I had the opportunity to spend some time with many of them and I admire what they've done and their continued commitment to the work of the Peace Corps.

Mr. Chairman, I was born into a migrant farm working family who toiled in the agricultural fields of Texas and California. Our standards of living were at the poverty level by anyone's standards, but we were rich in hopes and dreams. My parents instilled in us that America is a place where dreams can come true with hard work and determination. Today, one of those dreams has come true. I am humbled to have been nominated by the President of the United States. It's a long road from the agriculture fields of Watsonville, California to the hallowed halls of Washington, D. C.

Mr. Chairman, when President Kennedy announced the establishment of the Peace Corps, he challenged a new generation of Americans to join "... a grand and global alliance. . . to fight the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war. . . To those people in the huts and villages across the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery," he said, "we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves. . ." The words of President Kennedy still ring clear and true today as we begin a new era of leadership for the Peace Corps. While the mission of yesterday is still current and the need for experienced and motivated volunteers is greater than ever, we face new challenges in our changing world of today.

I have recently visited with several former Volunteers, experienced their diverse backgrounds and interests and heard how Peace Corps service has allowed them to redefine their goals and aspirations. Every single person has described their Peace Corps service as a defining time in their life. From Costa Rica to the Philippines to the continent of Africa, nearly every volunteer has expressed a sense of reward and fulfillment and a maturation in their perceptions of people in foreign lands. It is my strong belief that one of our immediate goals should be the continued strategic expansion and responsible growth of the Peace Corps to insure that this life-defining and rewarding opportunity is available for more Americans.

Volunteers today continue to teach the English language, work with communities to develop a way to address their needs, work with small farmers on food production and environmental conservation and to teach environmental awareness and education. As we address the challenges for the future in health education, especially HIV/AIDS education, information technology and business development, the preferred method is still to have a volunteer in the village, learning the language and interacting with the people of the host country. It is hard and demanding work. But work that makes an immeasurable difference.

I believe that now is the time to reacquaint the American people with the Peace Corps. Over the past several weeks, I have asked a number of people what they know and what they think about the Peace Corps. Most people have an exceptionally positive image of the Peace Corps, know that its roots are based on humanitarian service, and people remembered the images of Peace Corps in the 60's and 70's. But I did hear "Is Peace Corps still around?" and "What do they do these days?" In some cases, young people were not familiar with the Peace Corps at all. The consistency in these perceptions has surprised me. If confirmed, I will initiate the development of a strategic plan of outreach and communication to advance the cause and purpose of the Peace Corps. In doing so, I hope to re-introduce Peace Corps service to the American public and show them how to make a difference, how to promote world peace by helping people in other lands, and how to bring knowledge of those peoples back to America.

Mr. Chairman, the Peace Corps is uniquely designed and positioned as the face of America abroad. In many cases, our volunteers are the first and single exposure peoples of the world have to Americans. Thus, the value of Peace Corps work cannot be underestimated. But we all recognize that the face of America looks vastly different today than 40 years ago—or even 11 years ago. In step with those changes, I consider it a high priority to expand the diversity of the Peace Corps so that it becomes a true reflection of America. Diversity of ethnic backgrounds, life experiences and beliefs has strengthened our country in countless ways. And in doing so, we achieve an opportunity to engage a broader segment of the American population in one of our nation's greatest programs. Moreover, we can add to our legion of volunteers who continue to serve at home contributing to a better understanding of our world through the World Wise Schools and Fellows/USA programs.

Mr. Chairman, it is my strong belief that volunteer safety is one of the most important issues we must address and manage with great care. There are many areas of our modern world that can quickly become volatile and hostile. While we can never design or build a perfect system, we must do everything we can to insure that volunteers are given the opportunity to perform their valued work with minimal interruption or disruption. While I am confident that staff has made a concerted effort to maximize safety, it would be my highest priority to develop an aggressive agenda for monitoring and reforming safety measures to insure that procedures and policies adequately protect our volunteers abroad.

Volunteers are our number one asset. They come from all backgrounds, professions, ages, and communities. It is my hope that in the coming years we can persuade more Americans to accept the call to public service. Peace Corps service presents an opportunity for Americans to participate in a rich and rewarding vital experience, serving people around the world in a unique way. Once home, former volunteers have the opportunity to share their experiences with school children, service clubs and other community based organizations. During service, RPCVs can build bridges abroad and later they can build them at home. Bridges of mutual understanding, hope and opportunity. We are a uniquely blessed nation with a strong sense of values and purpose. On September 11, 2001, the very core of our nation was shaken but not broken. Our spirits were dampened but not defeated. It is my hope that these recent events will not diminish our resolve to public service, but will strengthen it and give us greater determination to advance the work of the Peace Corps. President Bush recently said about the tragedies, "Out of this evil will come good. Through our tears we see opportunities to make the world better for generations to come. And we will seize them." For Americans who feel a call to public service and want to make our world a better place, the Peace Corps is uniquely positioned to meet their call and seize the opportunities of our time.

Mr. Chairman and Member of the Committee, if confirmed, I look forward to serving with a talented and dedicated team at Peace Corps and building upon the extraordinary successes of the past forty years. Thank you for this opportunity to share some thoughts about my vision and hopes for the Peace Corps. I welcome the opportunity to answer any questions you may have.