

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

September 13, 2011

The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Chairman
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Howard Berman
Ranking Member
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
B360 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Ros-Lehtinen and Ranking Member Berman:

I am writing to update you on the Peace Corps' continuing efforts to better protect and support our Volunteers throughout the 76 countries in which we work. As you know, ensuring the safety and security of our dedicated Volunteers is our top priority, and we have made a number of additional reforms to advance that goal since I testified before the House Foreign Affairs Committee in May 2011.

New Training for Volunteers

The agency has prepared new standardized and comprehensive training for Volunteers on sexual assault. The training, which covers sexual assault awareness, risk reduction strategies, agency reporting and response protocols, and bystander intervention, replaces the sexual assault training currently provided to Volunteers. The new training has been reviewed by, and incorporates input from, the Department of Justice, the Department of Defense, and the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN), the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization. We are in the process of training overseas staff at all of our posts on the new sexual assault curriculum at regional "training of trainers" workshops, which will be complete by the end of the year.

The revamped sexual assault training will be provided to Volunteers as part of the approximately 10 weeks of training that they receive before they begin their Peace Corps service. Pre-service training, which takes place in the Volunteers' country of service, covers technical, cross-cultural, health, and safety and security issues.

In addition, all Volunteers are being trained on policies and procedures on bringing confidential communications and allegations to the attention of appropriate staff and officials, and on resources available to them in order to report allegations concerning Peace Corps staff, host country officials and other Volunteers.

New Training and Guidance for Staff

We have also taken a number of steps to improve the support that staff provide to Volunteers. At my direction, we have issued guidance for overseas staff on the specific procedures to follow when Volunteers express concerns about their safety, or in any other situations that threaten their well-being. The guidance makes clear that posts must act to ensure the safety of the Volunteer, and that quickly removing Volunteers from a threatening environment is the best way to ensure their safety.

Currently, Peace Corps Medical Officers, who provide medical services to Volunteers overseas, are receiving training on enhanced sexual assault forensic examination procedures as part of the standard

continuing medical education conferences that we regularly provide our medical staff. The current conferences are underway and will be complete in September. The new training builds upon the training on managing sexual assaults that Peace Corps Medical Officers receive when they join the agency. We are also developing online training for overseas staff on sexual assault awareness and victim sensitivity, which should be available this fall.

Peace Corps' technical guidelines for medical staff on the clinical management of sexual assaults have been revised to ensure compliance with the National Protocol for Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Examinations. The guidelines were reviewed by a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) who is a leading expert on forensic practices and is also a member of the International Association of Forensic Nurses (IAFN). The Peace Corps Medical Program and Training Advisor, who manages all training for Peace Corps Medical Officers, has also received training by the International Association of Forensic Nurses (IAFN) as a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE).

Work of the Victim Advocate


Since joining the agency in May 2011, our new Victim Advocate, Kellie Greene, has played a vital role in enhancing the Peace Corps' response to victims of crime. In addition to providing her expertise in the development of our new sexual assault training, Ms. Greene has provided support to Volunteers who were raped or physically assaulted. The support has ranged from providing assistance with navigating the various offices within Peace Corps to accompanying Volunteers back to post and supporting them through the legal processes.

Ms. Greene has also begun to work with agency staff on developing and implementing a plan to guide the role and services of the Victim Advocate and to ensure an agency-wide compassionate, coordinated, and effective response to Volunteers who are victims of crime. This plan is designed to ensure that the operating procedures of the Peace Corps are based on best practices and to institutionalize the role of the Victim Advocate in providing support to Volunteers who are victims of crime.

These new efforts build on the reforms I cited when I testified before the Committee in May 2011, and they demonstrate the Peace Corps' determination to assure our Volunteers that we will do everything we can to protect them from harm, and that we will provide a compassionate and effective response to those Volunteers who are victims of crime.

I welcome your continued interest in the well-being of Peace Corps Volunteers and I thank you for your support of the agency.

Sincerely,



Aaron S. Williams
Director

cc: Members of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs