AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

PEACE CORPS AT 50

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

MAY 11, 2011

Serial No. 112–16

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Affairs

Available via the World Wide Web: http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

66–292PDF WASHINGTON : 2011

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office
Internet: bookstore.gpo.gov Phone: toll free (866) 512–1800; DC area (202) 512–1800
Fax: (202) 512–2104 Mail: Stop IDCC, Washington, DC 20402–0001

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN, Florida, *Chairman*

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, New Jersey
DAN BURTON, Indiana
ELTON GALLEGLY, California
DANA ROHRABACHER, California
DONALD A. MANZULLO, Illinois
EDWARD R. ROYCE, California
STEVE CHABOT, Ohio
RON PAUL, Texas
MIKE PENCE, Indiana
JOE WILSON, South Carolina
CONNIE MACK, Florida
JEFF FORTENBERRY, Nebraska
MICHAEL T. MCCAUL, Texas
TED POE, Texas
GUS M. BILIRAKIS, Florida
JEAN SCHMIDT, Ohio
BILL JOHNSON, Ohio
DAVID RIVERA, Florida
MIKE KELLY, Pennsylvania
TIM GRIFFIN, Arkansas
TOM MARINO, Pennsylvania
JEFF DUNCAN, South Carolina
ANN MARIE BUERKLE, New York
RENEE ELLMERS, North Carolina
VACANT

HOWARD L. BERMAN, California
GARY L. ACKERMAN, New York
ENI F.H. FALEOMAVAEGA, American Samoa
DONALD M. PAYNE, New Jersey
BRAD SHERMAN, California
ELIOT L. ENGEL, New York
GREGORY W. MEEKS, New York
RUSS CARNAHAN, Missouri
ALBIO SIRES, New Jersey
GERALD E. CONNOLLY, Virginia
THEODORE E. DEUTCH, Florida
DENNIS CARDOZA, California
BEN CHANDLER, Kentucky
BRIAN HIGGINS, New York
ALLYSON SCHWARTZ, Pennsylvania
CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY, Connecticut
FREDERICA WILSON, Florida
KAREN BASS, California
WILLIAM KEATING, Massachusetts
DAVID CICILLINE, Rhode Island

YLEEM D.S. POBLETE, *Staff Director*
RICHARD J. KESSLER, *Democratic Staff Director*

CONTENTS

Page

WITNESSES

Ms. Lois Puzey, parent of late Peace Corps volunteer 22
Ms. Carol Clark, former Peace Corps volunteer 37
Ms. Jessica Smochek, former Peace Corps volunteer 46
Karestan Chase Koenen, Ph.D., former Peace Corps volunteer 58
Ms. Jennifer Wilson Marsh, hotline and affiliate service director, RAINN 73
The Honorable Aaron S. Williams, Director, Peace Corps 96
Ms. Kathy A. Buller, Inspector General, Peace Corps 117

LETTERS, STATEMENTS, ETC., SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING

The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Representative in Congress from the State of Florida, and chairman, Committee on Foreign Affairs:
- Statement from Chuck Ludlam and Paula Hirschoff, returned Peace Corp volunteers 4
- Letter dated May 6, 2011, from Building Bridges Coalition 12
- Prepared statement 14

Ms. Lois Puzey: Prepared statement 25
Ms. Carol Clark: Prepared statement 39
Ms. Jessica Smochek: Prepared statement 48
Karestan Chase Koenen, Ph.D.: Prepared statement 60
Ms. Jennifer Wilson Marsh: Prepared statement 75
The Honorable Ted Poe, a Representative in Congress from the State of Texas: Questions/statement 85
The Honorable Aaron S. Williams: Prepared statement 99
Ms. Kathy A. Buller: Prepared statement 119

APPENDIX

Hearing notice 138
Hearing minutes 139
Written responses from the Honorable Aaron S. Williams to questions submitted for the record by:
- The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen 141
- The Honorable Christopher H. Smith, a Representative in Congress from the State of New Jersey 151

The Honorable Gerald E. Connolly, a Representative in Congress from the Commonwealth of Virginia: Prepared statement 153
The Honorable Niki Tsongas, a Representative in Congress from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts: Statement 154
International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies: Statement 157

PEACE CORPS AT 50

WEDNESDAY, MAY 11, 2011

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:30 a.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. The committee will come to order. After recognizing myself and the ranking member, my good friend Mr. Berman of California, for 7 minutes each for our opening statements, I will recognize each member of the committee for 1 minute for their opening remarks. We will then hear from our witnesses.

I ask that you summarize your prepared statements in 5 minutes each before we move to the questions and answers with members under the 5-minute rule. Without objection, the witnesses' prepared statements will be made a part of the record. And members may have 5 days to insert statements and questions for the record subject to the length limitation in the rules.

We apologize if it looks like it is a sparsely attended hearing. We have the GOP Caucus going on now, the Democratic Caucus, and about five different committees having briefings and hearings as well. So it will slowly build up.

The chair now recognizes herself for 7 minutes.

March 1st, 2011 marked the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Peace Corps. We initially planned to hold this hearing in March, but postponed it to accommodate the many anniversary celebrations.

Over 200,000 Americans have served in the Peace Corps. Today, there are over 8,000 Peace Corps volunteers serving in 77 countries. Three hundred of these volunteers are from the State of Florida, and 9 are from my own district. According to the Peace Corps' facts and figures, 60 percent of current Peace Corps volunteers are female, and the average age of a Peace Corps volunteer is just 28 years old.

For half a century, Peace Corps volunteers have given their generous talents and skills to help the poor in developing countries, thereby increasing understanding between diverse cultures. For many, these Peace Corps volunteers serve as the only American faces to visit faraway places in distant lands, and volunteers should be proud of their accomplishments, as there are many to celebrate.

In spite of these successes, it is time to examine how, after 50 years, the Peace Corps is faring. In particular, we must review how

the Peace Corps, as an institution, has supported Peace Corps volunteers.

Despite critical reports by its own Inspector General, the Government Accountability Office, and prior congressional hearings, Peace Corps' safety and security failures have been a recurrent problem with tragic consequences for thousands of volunteers. Some who seek to ignore those problems have asserted that volunteer service, itself, is inherently risky as an excuse for lax and ineffective safety and security measures. That attitude is unacceptable.

Clearly, the conditions under which Peace Corps volunteers serve present unique challenges. Volunteers are often deployed to areas with restricted access to reliable communication, with limited or no police or medical services. Volunteers may have only a basic understanding of local language and culture, and may be viewed as relatively wealthy—becoming targets for criminal activity.

According to an April 2010 audit report by the Peace Corps Inspector General,

> "If compared to public colleges and universities, the Peace Corps would rank first for the most robberies, second for the most burglaries, and seventh for the most aggravated assaults. Further, in comparison to crime statistics reported by countries around the world, Peace Corps volunteers experience higher rates of rape and burglary than any of the 86 countries that responded to the United Nations crime statistics analysis."

Historically, the media have downplayed the dangers of serving in the Peace Corps, and have underreported and overlooked any criticism of the Peace Corps. Recently, this immunization has started to subside.

In 2003, the Dayton Daily News released its seven-part series entitled, "Casualties of Peace." Former Dayton Daily News Editor, Jeffrey Bruce stated,

> "The extent of this safety problem has been disguised for decades, partly because the assaults occurred thousands of miles away, partly because 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 the Peace Corps."

Earlier this year, on January 14th, the ABC television news program, 20/20, exposed the Peace Corps' failures regarding the reporting of sexual assault and rape, which spurred many victims to come forward about the mishandling of their cases. According to dozens of disturbing affidavits received by our committee, the Peace Corps' mishandling of rape and assault spans over four decades. Several of the affidavits are from volunteers currently serving in the Peace Corps. The affidavits received by the committee were obtained by First Response Action, a support group of volunteers who were victims of rape or assault.

The affidavits establish five basic themes: Volunteers are generally inadequately trained on sexual assault issues; volunteers are often placed in dangerous situations; the Peace Corps' in-country response often fails to meet survivors' needs; upon return to the United States, survivors often receive hostile rather than sup-

portive treatment; and, lastly, institutional obstacles often prevent survivors from receiving long-term medical and mental health care.

Without objection, I would like to include these affidavits into the official record.

[NOTE: The Peace Corps volunteer affidavits are not reprinted here but are available in committee records and on the committee's Web site.]

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. At this time, I would also like to include, without objection, a statement from returned volunteers, Chuck Ludlam and Paula Hirschoff, who have been advocates for reform to address problems with the Peace Corps, including safety and security.

[The information referred to follows:]

Statement of Chuck Ludlam and Paula Hirschoff
Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (Nepal, Kenya, Senegal) [1]
Regarding Peace Corps Reform Submitted to the House Foreign Affairs Committee
May 11, 2011

Following is a short version of our statement, without appendices. The complete statement is posted on PeaceCorpsWiki.org.

Introduction and Overview

When we heard how Kate Puzey, a Volunteer whistle blower, was murdered by Peace Corps staff in Benin, we grieved but were not surprised. When we heard how Jess Smochek was treated by the Peace Corps after she was raped in Bangladesh, we were distressed but not surprised.

Our statement will explain why these stories are rooted in Peace Corps culture, policies and practices and are not isolated incidents.

We loved serving as Volunteers in the 1960s and again from 2005 to '07. Over more than 40 years we have been proud of our service as Volunteers. In important ways, Peace Corps has shaped our lives. We are still involved with friends in Kenya, Nepal, and Senegal, the countries where we served. We feel a bond with other Volunteers. We think and act differently in the world as a result of our Peace Corps experiences. And the two of us met at a Peace Corps function. We deeply believe in the Peace Corps mission. It has been a force for good in the world.

During our second term of service, however, we became dismayed as we gradually realized the extent of mismanagement in the agency. Few Volunteers from the early decades have served again. If they did, most would share our alarm. During and after our recent service, we documented that the mismanagement is pervasive and deeply entrenched in Peace Corps culture.

Because we still have faith in the Peace Corps ideals, we cannot keep quiet about its manifest failures. The bottom line is that over the decades, the Peace Corps has substantially declined.

It falls far short of its idealistic goals and may be the worst managed agency of the Federal government.

This is a bipartisan loss and tragedy. The need for fundamental reforms has grown under Democratic as well as Republican administrations. The Peace Corps' refusal to listen to and protect Volunteers is bipartisan. Its failure to organize effectively as an agent of grassroots development is bipartisan. Its tendency to deny that there are any problems is bipartisan.

And certainly, the failure of Congress to oversee the agency has been bipartisan.

Bipartisan action to enact reform legislation is long overdue.

Why is the need for reform not well known? The Peace Corps has been tenacious in suppressing bad publicity. As we will explain, it conceals information about the many Volunteers who quit early and the serious problems

---

[1] **Curriculum Vitae: Chuck Ludlam and Paula Hirschoff:** Selected by Senator Dodd to testify on behalf of 8,000 current Volunteers before Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Dodd/Kennedy Peace Corps Volunteer Empowerment Act. S. 732 (PCVEA), July 2007. Flew in from Senegal, where we were serving as Volunteers, to testify. In June 2009 published comprehensive 20-point Peace Corps reform plan (PeaceCorpsWiki). From 2008-present, lead opponents of campaign to double Peace Corps Volunteer corps and of proposal to authorize monument to Peace Corps on National Mall. **Chuck Ludlam:** Twice served as Peace Corps Volunteer, Nepal (1968-70; Ag Extension) and with Paula in Senegal (2005-07; Agro-Forestry Extension). Co-founded Friends of Nepal. In 2009 served as advisor to Obama/Biden Transition Team for Peace Corps. In 2009 active in crafting provision of Kennedy Serve America Act (2009) authorizing Volunteers for Prosperity program, an alternative to the Peace Corps. Over 40-year period served as staff and legal counsel to various House and Senate Committees (1965, 1967, 1975-79, 1981-93, and 2001-05) and Carter White House (1979-81); trial attorney at Federal Trade Commission's Bureau of Consumer Protection (1972-75); and Vice President and principal lobbyist for the association representing 1000 firms of biotechnology industry (1993-2001). Stanford University (BA 1967) and University of Michigan Law School (JD, 1972). **Paula Hirschoff:** Twice served as Volunteer, Kenya (1968-70; Education) and with Chuck in Senegal (2005-07; Small Enterprise Development). Served on board of Friends of Kenya. Docent at National Museum of African Art (1989-present) and docent chair (20010-11). College English instructor; writer/editor, congressional aide, journalist (1967-2005). Macalester College (BA 1966); George Washington University (MA in Anthropology, 1996). **Contact information:** Chuck.Ludlam@gmail.com, Phirschoff@gmail.com, 4020 Reno Road NW, Washington, D.C. 20008, 202-364-6021. **Disclosure under clause 2(g)(5) of House Rule XI: We have never received a Federal grant (or sub-grant) or contract (or subcontract).**

revealed in its Volunteer survey results. During the recent campaign to expand the number of Volunteers in the field, the Peace Corps and National Peace Corps Association quashed pending reform legislation and discussion of reforms. Moreover, the Volunteers have little incentive to speak up for change. Instead, many quit early in frustration, often blaming themselves for the problems they experienced. When younger Volunteers return home, they are soon too preoccupied with readjusting to get involved with reform. Few Volunteers know how to organize to seek reform, and the Peace Corps gives them no effective outlets in policy-making circles. In this information vacuum, the media usually produce puff pieces when they cover Peace Corps. With no one holding the agency accountable, it's no wonder that it has atrophied.

What are the underlying problems? Today's Peace Corps is a hierarchy with Volunteers at the bottom. It's highly bureaucratic and risk-averse. While many of the staff do excellent work under trying conditions, many others condescend to Volunteers, devalue what they offer, and focus on regulating rather than empowering them. Although Volunteers are in the best position to assess the agency's performance, their input is largely ignored. Typically, bureaucratic concerns trump the agency's idealistic mission.

The Volunteers who do speak out about mismanagement are often shunned or sent home.

In most countries Volunteers say that to survive the bureaucracy they must "fly under the radar" and stay clear of management. When Volunteers succeed, they often say that it's in spite of, not because of the bureaucracy. The root cause of this labor-management divide is that the Peace Corps lacks sufficient respect for the Volunteers to establish effective listening mechanisms.

It follows that our lead reform proposal is to mandate that the Peace Corps establish listening mechanisms to encourage Volunteers to offer constructive input regarding staff performance and program effectiveness – on a confidential basis. This will empower Volunteers to reform the Peace Corps *from the inside*. In addition, we propose to empower applicants by publicizing metrics of the agency's performance so that they can determine which Peace Corps programs are well managed. This will pressure the agency to reform *from the outside*. Finally, we propose to utilize the ultimate incentive – *vigorous and healthy market competition* between the Peace Corps and the newly authorized Volunteers for Prosperity program. With this combination of systems, incentives and pressure, we have hope that the Peace Corps will begin to live up to its iconic reputation.

Listening Mechanisms Guaranteeing Confidentiality and Protection Against Retaliation

Enactment of mandates for the Peace Corps to establish listening mechanisms is our first major recommendation. If the Volunteers are empowered to speak out on a confidential basis without fear of retaliation, the Peace Corps will face effective *internal* pressure to reform.

The urgent need for this reform was intensified by the murder of Peace Corps Volunteer and whistle blower Kate Puzey in Benin by a Peace Corps staff member who she had reported was raping students at her school. Kate begged that her identity as a whistle blower be held in confidence. The Peace Corps staff blew her cover and failed to warn her that she was in jeopardy. As a foreseeable consequence, the accused staffer murdered Kate.

It appears that the Peace Corps did not refer the case to the Federal Bureau of Investigation to determine whether the Country Director should be indicted for violating Kate's civil rights.[2]

Two years *before* her murder in 2007, Senators Chris Dodd and Ted Kennedy introduced legislation mandating that the Peace Corps guarantee confidentiality for Volunteer whistle blowers and protect them against retaliation. In July 2007 while serving as Volunteers in West Africa, we flew to Washington to testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in favor of the Dodd/Kennedy bill protections. The Peace Corps opposed that legislation. It disparaged the idea that there was anything broken in the Peace Corps. The National Peace Corps Association also opposed the legislation. Then in March 2009 Kate was murdered.

Would the Dodd/Kennedy bill protections have saved her life? It's a haunting question. We can't answer a hypothetical, but it appears that the actions and policies of Peace Corps Headquarters were *just as* culpable as the actions and policies in Benin. The agency's reluctance to listen to and respect Volunteer whistle blowers such as Kate is deeply entrenched in Peace Corps culture. The problems leading to her death are part of Peace Corps culture and policies. This cannot be dismissed as an isolated or unforeseeable event.

We failed Kate because we were not tough and persuasive enough to defeat the opponents of the Dodd/Kennedy bill reforms. We feel troubled and indirectly responsible for her death.

In March 2010, a year *after* Kate was murdered, we tried again to enact protections for Volunteer whistle blowers, raising them as amendments to the 2009 Dodd Peace Corps Reauthorization legislation. Again, the agency and NPCA opposed and killed them.

---

[2] See Title 18, U.S.C., Section 241 (Conspiracy Against Rights) and Title 18, U.S.C., Section 242 (Deprivation of Rights Under Color of Law).

In June 2010 *after* Senator Dodd had formally requested that the Peace Corps "assess" mechanisms to solicit Volunteers' views on a confidential basis, the Peace Corps failed to do so.
On January 14, 2011, the *same day* that the 20/20 expose was broadcast, the Peace Corps promulgated its first rules to protect Volunteer whistle blowers. The rules are narrow, confusing, and cumbersome. They fall far short of the listening mechanisms and protections in the 2007 Dodd/Kennedy bill. *Attached is our analysis highlighting 23 major problems with these rules.*
The bottom line is that the Peace Corps has published poorly crafted rules 33 years *after* the rest of the government came under the Federal Whistle Blower Act of 1978. This is an unconscionable delay and the work is shoddy.
The timing of the new Peace Corps rules suggests that they are designed to discourage the Congress from enacting reform legislation. But with the issuance of these rules, the Peace Corps has acknowledged that Volunteer whistle blowers deserve protection. This step strengthens arguments for mandating that these protections become a permanent part of Peace Corps culture.
The Peace Corps' hostility to Volunteer whistle blowers explains why the circumstances of Kate Puzey's death do not surprise us.
It is time now – finally – to enact the Dodd/Kennedy proposals to establish mechanisms whereby Volunteer whistle blowers can speak out on a confidential basis and be protected from retaliation.[3] We should ignore Peace Corps staff objections that are based on fears of what the Volunteers will say about their performance. This proposal won't bring Kate back but it will protect future Volunteers.
The Dodd/Kennedy listening mechanisms would ensure that Volunteers are heard when they review staff performance, Peace Corps policies, training, site preparation, and development programs. The Volunteers know best which staff members are competent and which programs are working. The Peace Corps must reverse course and heed their comments. But they won't speak out if the agency doesn't guarantee them confidentiality and protection against retaliation.
If Volunteers are empowered to speak out, the Peace Corps can begin a process for continuous renewal. Organizations that respect their employees set up these listening mechanisms. They're called 360 degree reviews. Such organizations do not fear what employees will report about management. Consumers in many areas have rating mechanisms. Examples are RateMyTeacher.com, Angie's list, and Amazon. Now it's time for the Volunteers to be given the means to rate their managers.
Unless Congress requires it to do so, the Peace Corps will not establish effective mechanisms to listen to Volunteers and protect whistle blowers.

Professional and Sensitive Policies for Rape and Sexual Assaults
Implementation of a new and professional strategy to prevent and manage rape and sexual assaults is our second major recommendation to revitalize the Peace Corps. The listening mechanisms and protections for whistle blowers are essential in this area too. They will ensure that the Peace Corps listens to Volunteer views regarding its policies and practices on preventing and responding to sexual assaults and rapes.
The Peace Corps has failed to develop sensitive, professional policies and practices to prevent rapes and sexual assaults and to follow modern procedures in caring for the victims.
This delay is also unconscionable. This is consistent with its overriding failure to listen to and respect the Volunteers. This is why the stories of Peace Corps rape and assault victims do not surprise us.
Incidents of rape and sexual assault in the general population are substantially underreported because women fear that they will be blamed or demeaned. Peace Corps victims are especially reluctant to report these crimes because they have seen that the staff blames and demeans victims and tries to sever connections with them as soon as possible. The Peace Corps should take extensive additional steps to ensure that sexual assaults and rapes are reported, that Volunteer safety is the agency's highest priority and that the incidents are managed to the highest standards of professional care. Safe practices include better security for Volunteer living quarters. The Peace Corps Inspector General has found that "40% of the Volunteers' houses did not meet the [Peace Corps] posts' own criteria for safe housing…"[4]

Emphasis on Quality, not Quantity, and Honest Metrics of Agency Performance
Ending the Peace Corps' expansion campaign and mandating that the agency become more transparent with OMB, the Congress, and the applicants is our third major recommendation to revitalize the Peace Corps. Again, the Peace Corps must listen to the Volunteers, who support reform over expansion.

---

[3] These provisions appear as an appendix to this statement printed in PeaceCorpsWiki.
[4] PC OIG Semiannual Report to Congress (April 1, 2008 - September 30, 2008) at 20.

Unfortunately, the agency's high priority over the decades has been to increase the number of Volunteers in the field. This effort has been led recently by the More Peace Corps campaign sponsored by the National Peace Corps Association and the Push for Peace Corps campaign.

This is a classic example of favoring quantity over quality. Given the pervasive mismanagement, additional Volunteers is the last thing this troubled agency needs. The agency's own survey of Volunteers found that they supported *reform over expansion* by a 5 to 2 margin. But, once again, their point of view was ignored.

The Peace Corps has recently added 1,000 Volunteers worldwide. These additional Volunteers were generally added to the workload of existing staff, many of whom have been stretched to the breaking point. The Peace Corps Inspector General (IG) has found that the agency has no definition of "quality" so it cannot even attempt to measure the inevitable tradeoffs between quantity and quality. The IG reported that Peace Corps staff had expressed concerns about a decline in Volunteer "quality and suitability for service…as (staff) face increasing pressure to meet agency growth targets." It found that staff were being "encouraged to request lower-skilled trainees…[5] And now, with the government's move toward budget austerity, all of the recent expansion must be unwound – a management nightmare. The expansion appears to have been a disastrous miscalculation. It has, however, succeeded in helping to kill reform legislation and silence any mention of the agency's problems.

We believe that only by ending the expansion campaign will the Peace Corps be able to focus intently on reform. We believe this because honesty about the Peace Corps has been in short supply during the expansion campaign. This campaign rested partly on a misleading claim that there are 3 applicants for every Volunteer training slot. As recently as Fiscal 2008, 97% of the applicants who survived the medical selection process were invited to training. In Fiscal 2007 it was 96%. So in those years medical fitness was the basic criterion for service. In other words, nearly everyone who is considered medically fit gets to enter training to become a Volunteer.

The scarcity of jobs probably contributed to a recent surge in applicants who are economic refugees, but they are not necessarily well motivated and qualified to serve as Volunteers.

Peace Corps staff may complain about the Volunteers' motivation and sense of responsibility, but the agency itself has chosen not to be selective and to expand despite the absence of a surplus of well qualified applicants.

The expansion campaign has been premised on a second misleading claim that "20 countries" are shovel-ready for new or renewed Peace Corps programs. Apparently no such list exists. The Peace Corps could not find one in response to our FOIA request. The Volunteers in at least a dozen countries say their programs should be shut down, but again the Peace Corps doesn't heed their point of view.

In addition, the Peace Corps hides the fact that 30-35% of Volunteers worldwide are talking with their feet and quitting early. In some countries and some programs the early quit rate is 40%, 60%, or up to 87%. Over the 2005-08 fiscal years, 35 different countries had an early-quit rate of 40% or more.[6] Fifteen of these countries have had early-quit rates greater than 40% in multiple years. During this reporting period, there were only six countries that didnt experience an early-quit rate of 30% or more[7] and not a single country that maintained an early quit rate of less than 20%. Since 2005 the Peace Corps has been manipulating statistics so it can conceal this embarrassing information from OMB, the Congress, the media, and the applicants. Of course, the applicants have a vital interest in knowing if they've been invited to a country with a high or low early quit rate. Why would any applicant accept an invitation to serve in a country with an early quit rate of more than 20%? High early quit rates demoralize those who

---

[5] Final Program Evaluation Report: Follow-Up Evaluation of the Volunteer Delivery System, Peace Corps Office of Inspector General (December 2010) at i. Overall the PC IG found that the agency had not "initiated" or "fully carried out" the IG's comprehensive recommendations of 2003 for improving the delivery of services to Volunteers.

[6] The 35 countries with early-quit rates of more than 40% include: Armenia 42.2% (05); Belize 42.5% (06); Botswana 47.5% (06); Burkina Faso 45.5% (05), 40.3% (06), and 41.4% (07); Cameroon 55.6% (05); Cape Verde 44% (05); Eastern Caribbean 44.4% (06) and 42.3% (07); Ecuador 44% (06); Ethiopia 47.4% (08); Fiji 53.1% (06); Georgia 48.9% (05); Guyana 50% (06) and 42.4% (07); Jamaica 45% (05), 44.1% (07), and 48% (08); Jordan 50% (05), 59.5% (07), and 55.3% (08); Kazakhstan 52.5% (05) and 46.6% (08); Kenya 41.2% (05); Kiribati 55.2% (05), 53.5% (06), and 86.7% (07); Kyrgyzstan 56.1% (05), 52.5% (06), 51.6% (07), and 56.7% (08); Mexico 46.7% (05); Micronesia 42.3% (06) and 44% (08); Moldova 46.2% (05), 42.5% (07), and 42.6% (08); Mongolia 41.7% (07) and 43.9% (08); Morocco 48.5% (05); Niger 41.4% (06); Samoa 50% (05) and 56.3% (07); South Africa 56.5% (07); Surname 73.7% (05), 61.5% (07), and 40% (08); Swaziland 51.5% (05) and 40.7% (06); Togo 53.5% (07) and 41.7% (08); Tonga 53.5% (06) and 45.5% (08); Turkmenistan 40.5% (05) and 48.5% (06); Uganda 44.1% (05); Uzbekistan 43.8% (05); Vanuatu 43.1% (05); and Zambia 47% (08). Fifteen of these countries have had early-quit rates greater than 40% in multiple years.

[7] The six countries that did not experience an early quit rate of 30% or more were China, Guinea, Macedonia, Nicaragua, Peru, and Romania.

stay to complete their service. They destroy continuity between Volunteers. They confuse and disappoint the communities where the Volunteers serve. One can make a strong case that the agency is squandering a percentage of its budget roughly equal to the early quit rate. The agency's misrepresentation about this rate means that vital information is not used to target improvements in programs with the highest quit rate and poorest management. The Peace Corps dares not admit the truth about the early quit rates, because it would reveal that to expand, it must first fill these vacated slots – a costly and continuous treadmill.

The agency also hides the fact that its own surveys of Volunteers document pervasive malaise and mismanagement. We obtained a copy of the country-by-country results for the 2008 survey from a staff whistle blower. We created an excel spread sheet that ranks the countries from top to bottom on each survey question. The same countries land at the top or bottom on question after question. These results revealed that about 15 countries were well managed. The Volunteers give marginal or low ratings to many Country Directors and other staff and the programs to which they were assigned. The Country Director in Benin when Kate was murdered ranked in the bottom 10 worldwide. The survey data dovetails with the early quit rate data: The same countries rank low or high. The agency seems to have no system to use the surveys to overhaul the worst-managed programs.

The Peace Corps has refused to release the country-by-country results for the 2009 and 2010 in response to our FOIA requests. It denied us access to this information because the Peace Corps is loath to divulge the country-by-country and program-by-program results to applicants as they might refuse an invitation to serve in a low-ranked country. Also, were this information to become public, it would be toxic to the expansion campaign. These are not valid reasons for refusing to comply with FOIA or President Obama's transparency initiative. We believe we have been successful in recruiting a top law firm to sue the Peace Corps to compel it to divulge the country-by-country results under FOIA.

We recommend that the Congress compel the Peace Corps to reveal the country-by-country and program-by-program early-quit rates and survey results to OMB, the Congress, the public and the applicants. If the applicants are empowered to be selective in accepting an invitation to serve, the Peace Corps will face effective *external* pressure to reform.[8] If the Peace Corps finds it difficult to persuade applicants to serve in the worst managed programs in countries with the highest early quit rates and the worst survey responses, it would feel pressure to intervene to fundamentally overhaul or shutter these programs. A powerful incentive for reform.

More Emphasis on First Goal

Our fourth major recommendation is for the Congress to mandate that the Peace Corps take the First Goal much more seriously as an essential element of the Peace Corps mission. Again, the key pressure will come from listening to Volunteers about the performance of the managers and the effectiveness of the programs in which they work.

Regarding its First Goal of sustainable grassroots development, the Peace Corps fails to acknowledge that it has fallen far short. For over 50 years, it has had no effective system to document the Volunteer projects that worked and those that did not. It has minimal systems to document Volunteers' work on a site-by-site basis or to develop strategic plans for each site.

When the Volunteers develop an effective project, the Peace Corps has no system for taking those plans to scale. The Peace Corps makes essentially no use of Best Practice Guides. It could have developed thousands by now based on the experiences of 200,000 returned Volunteers. That it failed to do is an irretrievable waste and loss. In addition, the Peace Corps has not updated its philosophy or strategy for development and does not participate in the international debates about the most effective ways to spur development.

The Peace Corps does not provide seed capital for Volunteer projects. Yet such seed capital is sorely needed to launch demonstrations. Host country nationals are not persuaded by ideas and talk; they learn when they can see something demonstrated. The lack of seed capital is crippling and demoralizing. And the Peace Corps has set up bureaucratic rules that keep Volunteers from fundraising to support their projects. The Dodd/Kennedy bill allocates seed capital to Volunteers and permits more Volunteer fundraising.

As a result of these First Goal failures, new Volunteers usually start from scratch with little guidance on projects and strategies that they might seek to implement. Predictably, many young Volunteers get frustrated and quit – literally or figuratively. Of course, some individual Volunteers achieve substantial successes, but they often say that this is in spite of, not because of the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps' failures as a grassroots development agency not only hurt the Volunteers; they also deprive the host countries of the kind of assistance they desperately need and deserve.

The Peace Corps is more successful at its Second Goal – cultural exchange. Volunteers, who often speak the local language and live at the grassroots level, are wonderful cultural ambassadors for the United States. But the cost of some $50,000 per Volunteer per year is exceedingly expensive.

[8] These provisions appear as an appendix to this statement posted on PeaceCorpsWiki.

Upgrade Inadequate Administrative Infrastructure

Our sixth recommendation is that the Congress mandate that the Peace Corps upgrade its inadequate administrative infrastructure.

In its zeal to expand, the Peace Corps is not taking steps to reform its antiquated administrative infrastructure. The Peace Corps has more political appointees per capita than any other federal agency. For decades it has been a dumping ground for political appointees. We recommend cutting the number of political appointees at the Peace Corps by two-thirds. The Country Directors make or break the programs they lead. Yet the selection of country directors is not organized to eliminate favoritism based on political connections. The Peace Corps Inspector General is not appointed by the President so he or she is not independent of the political appointees. As a result, the lead in investigating crimes against Volunteers was taken away from the Peace Corps IG, a move designed to minimize the bad publicity that was arising from the IG's investigations of these crimes and prosecutions of the perpetrators. The five-year limit on the tenure of Peace Corps staff means that no one stays very long, so the agency has little institutional memory. Short-term civil service staff cannot stand up to the political appointees. Staff turnover is constant and chaotic. Because of the five-year rule, agency staff do not have civil service rights. They are considered "temporary" employees who lack key rights of other federal employees. They can be fired arbitrarily at the whim of a political appointee. They need to be given whistle blower rights and protections. This is a way to respect the Peace Corps staff.

The Peace Corps prides itself on not having "rules" but this means that when it publishes guidance that has the effect of rules it does not comply with the Administrative Procedure Act and publish proposals for public comment. The Peace Corps is not transparent with applicants about the early-quit rate and survey responses in the country in which they are invited to serve. We have posted advice to applicants on PeaceCorpsWiki.org, the website for in-depth analysis of Peace Corps policies and performance, suggesting what they should know before deciding whether to accept an invitation to serve. Also, after "nominating" an applicant to a specific program and country, the Peace Corps actually "invites" the applicant to serve in a different country and program about 40% of the time; applicants are allowed only 10 days to decide whether to "take it or leave it." These switches, done for the convenience of the Peace Corps, are unfair to the applicants. Such administrative shortcomings prevent the Peace Corps from listening to and respecting the Volunteers and civil service staff.

Market Competition to Spur Peace Corps Reform

Our final recommendation is for the Congress to put the Peace Corps into vigorous and healthy competition with the Volunteers for Prosperity (VfP) program. Even if Volunteers are empowered to speak out and applicants are empowered to be selective, *we believe that only through intense market competition will the Peace Corps become committed to reform.*

It is time to ask whether the Peace Corps model – an expansive, risk-averse, and rigid bureaucracy – is workable at current funding levels. The scandal exposed by 20/20 and the Federal Budget crisis act in synergy to raisethe risk that Congress will simply slash the Peace Corps budget, generating a net reduction in placements. However, if we act boldly, we can address the scandals and the budget crisis both at once and actually increase the number of these placements five to six-fold.

Had Peace Corps been less of a national icon, it might have evolved into a decentralized program that placed Volunteers with NGOs. This is how VISTA evolved into AmeriCorps in 1993. VISTA still exists, but it is dwarfed by AmeriCorps, which has far more volunteers. Compared to VISTA. AmeriCorps has minimal bureaucracy and cost because it connects volunteers with NGOs who handle selection, training, placement, and support. As a result, nearly 600,000 AmeriCorps volunteers have done domestic service in only 18 years since the program was established.

Since the Peace Corps was founded, NGOs have multiplied into the thousands, many led by host country nationals. The Peace Corps has failed to ask how this might fundamentally alter the Peace Corps model of service.

The Congress is well aware of the AmeriCorps model and has already enacted the VfP program *for international service* modeled on the domestic program. VfP was authorized as part of the Kennedy Serve America Act in 2009, although it has been operating since 2003. VfP connects American volunteers with international NGOs at a fraction of the cost per Volunteer of the Peace Corps. VfP applicants can choose among hundreds of NGOs, including those operating in countries that have no Peace Corps program and those with work assignments not offered by the Peace Corps. Because VfP is decentralized, it minimizes the participants' exposure to terrorist attack.

We propose that over a period of 3 to 4 years, *half* of the Peace Corps budget be allocated to VfP.[9] This would mean an allocation of about $200 million to the Peace Corps and the same to VfP. With its half, the Peace Corps could field 4,000 Volunteers. With its half, VfP could field up to 40,000 volunteers. Thus, by better utilizing the Peace Corps' current budget, we could see a *five to six fold increase in the total number of international voluntary placements.*

The Peace Corps might argue that each of its *Volunteer is worth five to ten times more than a VfP volunteer*. Given the current mismanagement, however, it cannot credibly substantiate such a claim.

Of course, some NGOs, too, are poorly managed, but applicants can find out which ones are run well and apply to them. Indeed, with VfP we could set up a market competition among the NGOs to enable VfP applicants to make informed choices among potential positions; this would give the NGOs an incentive to improve their management of volunteers. No such market mechanisms operate for the Peace Corps. With fewer slots to fill, the Peace Corps would have a surplus of applicants and could select those with a demonstrated commitment to grassroots development and cross-cultural immersion and could provide them with substantially better training and technical support. This should reduce the costly early-quit rate.

Even if the Peace Corps were not mismanaged, this new divvy is a smart strategy given the Federal budget realities. We must make more cost-effective use of our resources as they grow scarce.

One key issue regarding VfP is whether the Peace Corps would make a bid to manage it. The Corporation for National Service manages both VISTA and AmeriCorps.

Our proposal is not to terminate the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps trains Volunteers in local languages, trains them to work at the grassroots level, and often sends them to villages where NGOs are less active or nonexistent. However, the proposal would end the Peace Corps monopoly on government-sponsored international voluntary service. The Peace Corps would continue as one of 2 major options for international voluntary service through the U.S. government. Achieving a balance between the Peace Corps and VfP would provide healthy market competition for the Peace Corps and spur it to embrace reform.

If over time the Peace Corps does not reform itself, then VfP would deserve greater and greater claims on the budget for international voluntary placements. The competition would thus determine whether the Peace Corps survives.

We know that our proposed divvy between the Peace Corps and VfP will be controversial. VISTA alumni vigorously opposed the establishment of AmeriCorps. The Peace Corps opposed the authorization for VfP. It is ironic that the Peace Corps opposed VfP and did not move to take it over, given that the Peace Corps has now organized a similar program: Peace Corps Response.[10] (If the Peace Corps takes over management of VfP, it's not clear how VfP and Response might be meshed or merged.) Fortunately, both AmeriCorps and VfP were enacted.

---

[9] The Peace Corps appropriation for FY 2010 was $400 million. Under the current Continuing Resolution for FY 2011, its appropriation would be the same. The House FY 2011 appropriation bill set its appropriation at $340 million (FY 08) level. Assuming that Peace Corps is appropriated $400 for current fiscal year, we recommend that Peace Corps authorization be set at $350 million for FY 2012; $300 million for FY 2013; $250 million for FY 2014; and $200 million for FY 2015. We recommend that appropriation for Volunteers for Prosperity program dovetail Peace Corps appropriation and be set at $50 million for FY 2012; $100 million for FY 2013; $150 million for FY 2014; and $200 million for FY 2015. If Peace Corps appropriation is set at $340 million for FY 2011, then these figures would need to be adjusted accordingly. The Peace Corps needs a few years to downsize and VfP needs a few years to ramp up.

[10] Many of our criticisms of the traditional Peace Corps would be vitiated if it were managed in a professional manner as appears to be the case with the Response program. Response places about 200 returned Volunteers per year, assignment by assignment, in "challenging" grassroots development jobs for a 3 to 12 month period. The Response positions require the participants to have appropriate skills – including language and cross-cultural and to work independently, with minimal Peace Corps staff support or supervision. Assignments are typically fashioned by Peace Corps overseas staff working with partnering local organizations to meet a specific need of the host country. As well these positions provide quality opportunities for the Response Volunteer to obtain career-focused experience while accomplishing tangible results in a condensed period of time. Peace Corps Response seeks to make the strongest match possible between an organization's request for assistance and the Volunteer's language, technical, and cross cultural skills critical for partner organizations and the communities in which they serve. Peace Corps Response Volunteers are able to make valuable contributions because they come equipped with the skills and are thus ready to have an immediate impact. The application and placement process takes a fraction of the time it takes to process an application to serve as a Volunteer. Competition for the positions can be intense. On average, the time from when an assignment opens to when a volunteer is placed in country is 6-10 weeks. Response Volunteers receive a short Peace Corps orientation upon arrival in the country, generally three days. The partnering organization

We hope that Peace Corps alumni will support this five to six fold increase in the number of international placements rather than merely defending the Peace Corps. We believe it's time for the Congress to invest in VfP as it has invested in AmeriCorps so that we can preserve and increase the number of international placements.
To set up this competition, the Committee should adopt the amendments to the VfP authorizing legislation which are attached. And regarding Peace Corps reform, we have attached draft legislation to the Committee encompassing all of our recommendations.

Summary and Conclusion
In our statement we have explained why we were not surprised by the 20/20 expose. We have documented the hostility of the Peace Corps to Volunteer whistle blowers and its insensitivity to victims of rape and sexual assault. We have put these facts in the context of an agency that is hierarchical, risk averse, bureaucratic, and secretive. It misrepresents early-quit rates, hides results of its own surveys of Volunteers, emphasizes quantity rather than quality, makes false claims to support the expansion campaign, fails to organize itself for First Goal effectiveness, and continues ineffective management practices. These problems paint a consistent and coherent picture of an agency that has lost a sense of its mission.
We have not just complained; we have proposed mandating an array of interlocking systems that will apply pressure from the inside and outside and through market competition to ensure that the Peace Corps embraces reform. We trust that these systems will become a permanent fixture of Peace Corps culture so that the Congress will not again be forced to revisit the reform imperative. *We have attached to this statement legislative language on the key reform issues.*
The Committee does not need to rely on our viewpoint and recommendations but can listen directly to the Volunteers in the field. The Peace Corps has the email address of every Volunteer. With one key stroke the Committee could send them all a questionnaire about the agency's professionalism and reform options. Do not assume that the Headquarters staff speak for the Volunteers. The Volunteers are the most reliable source of information on the health of the Peace Corps. They have a markedly different point of view from that of management. We are confident that they will confirm our viewpoint and endorse our recommendations.
Thank you for listening to and respecting the Volunteer perspective. The Volunteers are the only reason for the Peace Corps; the agency is nothing without them. The Volunteers will enthusiastically endorse your oversight and legislative agenda for this troubled agency. We must empower Volunteers, enhance Congressional oversight, and encourage the press to ask penetrating questions. The immunity of the Peace Corps to constructive criticism must end.
Finally, with the 20/20 expose raising existential questions and this Committee listening to and respecting the Volunteers, we would like to be more confident that reforms will soon be mandated. But after fighting for reform for six years without success, we remain skeptical that the mandates will be enacted. For over 50 years this has been an agency that no one has been willing or able to hold accountable. We hope that the Committee will prove that our pessimism about the prospects for enacting reform is not warranted. The stakes are too high to abandon this agency. The Peace Corps is still America's best outreach to the world. In its fiftieth anniversary year, the Peace Corps deserves the time and attention needed to hold it to the high ideals with which it was founded. We are happy to answer your questions.

---

also provides an orientation. Response typically places Volunteers in about 30 countries per year and operates in countries that have no current Peace Corps program (like Bosnia, Venezuela, Czech Republic, and Sri Lanka). The Response Volunteers are considered to be Peace Corps Volunteers with the same benefits package, including medical care and a readjustment allowance. The Peace Corps is moving to expand Response and even open it up to individuals who have not previously served as Volunteers.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Further, without objection, I would like to include for the record a statement from the Building Bridges Coalition, a consortium of 300 international volunteer organizations, regarding Peace Corps safety and security.

[The information referred to follows:]

May 6, 2011

The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen – Chairwoman
The Honorable Howard Berman – Ranking Member
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Ros-Lehtinen and Ranking Member Berman,

I write on behalf of the Building Bridges Coalition, a consortium of more than 300 international volunteer organizations, corporations, universities and colleges and others working collaboratively to promote the field of international volunteering. We are united in our desire to improve the quality of volunteer service, maximize positive impacts of international volunteer service in communities around the world and at home, and scale up the number of international volunteers sent abroad annually.

We are also united in our admiration and appreciation of the Peace Corps. Many of the programs we have launched over the years have been inspired by the ideals and practices initiated by the Peace Corps fifty years ago. Many individuals who are employed by our organizations have successful Peace Corps service in their background. For many within our coalition, the Peace Corps remains as the "gold standard" in international volunteer service.

It is our understanding that a primary focus of your May 11th committee hearing centers on the safety and security of volunteers, with a particular emphasis on sexual assault. We share your concern and applaud your efforts to advance practical solutions that will improve the structure and mechanisms so that volunteers receive the training, support and care they deserve to address the issues of physical and sexual violence. However, it needs to be noted that while the safety and security of volunteers should be the top priority for all, a meaningful, effective and impactful volunteer experience cannot occur without some level of risk.

It is also our hope that this hearing recognizes the important role that Peace Corps and other international volunteers make in our nation's outreach to citizens and communities

all around the world. As Congressman Poe noted on the House floor this past February, "(Peace Corps volunteers) really are, in my opinion, along with our United States military, the greatest ambassadors we have from our country to show that we are concerned about the welfare of other nations. And they help build a better life for not only the people that they come in contact with, but their generations and the children that they have as well. I think they are really volunteer angels."

We wholeheartedly agree and are confident that Congress, the Peace Corps and others will work together to bring meaningful improvements to the safety and security of volunteers while continuing to advance opportunities for our citizens to serve our nation by serving overseas.

Sincerely,

Steven C. Rosenthal
Chairperson
Building Bridges Coalition

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Finally, I will be handing Mr. Williams a letter from a constituent of mine who was serving in the Peace Corps but was recently terminated. I am asking the Peace Corps to explain why it did not accommodate the medical concerns of this older volunteer.

At our hearing today, three returned Peace Corps volunteers have made the difficult decision to testify about their traumatic experiences, and I commend them for their bravery, and continued commitment to effect positive change in the Peace Corps.

We will also hear from the mother of a Peace Corps volunteer who did not return home. Lois Puzey will testify about her courageous daughter and how the Peace Corps failed Kate when she reported the rape and abuse of students for whom she cared so deeply. Following this testimony, we will hear from Peace Corps Director Aaron Williams, and the Peace Corps Inspector General Kathy Buller. Our goal is to find ways to address these problems so that future Peace Corps volunteers will not fear for their safety.

And we are joined today—thank you, Senator Isakson from Georgia. We are joined by Senator Johnny Isakson, whose constituent is Lois Puzey. Senator Isakson's presence is another indication of his commitment to securing justice for Lois' daughter, Kate, who was killed during her service as a Peace Corps volunteer in Benin. And I understand that Senator Isakson will be traveling there next week to get a further update on Kate's case.

Now I am pleased to recognize my good friend, Ranking Member Berman for his opening remarks.

[The prepared statement of Chairman Ros-Lehtinen follows:]

CHAIRMAN ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Opening Statement
Hearing: "Peace Corps at 50"
May 11, 2011

March 1st, 2011 marked the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Peace Corps. We initially planned to hold this hearing in March, but postponed it to accommodate their anniversary celebrations.

Over 200,000 Americans have served in the Peace Corps. Today, there are over 8,000 Peace Corps volunteers serving in 77 countries. Three hundred of these volunteers are from the state of Florida, and 9 are from my own district. According to Peace Corps' facts and figures, 60% of current Peace Corps volunteers are female, and the average age of a Peace Corps volunteer is just 28 years old.

For half a century, Peace Corps volunteers have given their generous talents and skills to help the poor in developing countries, thereby increasing understanding between diverse cultures. For many, these Peace Corps volunteers serve as the only American faces to visit faraway places in distant lands, and volunteers should be proud of their accomplishments, as there are many to celebrate.

In spite of these successes, it is time to examine how, after 50 years, the Peace Corps, is faring. In particular, we must review how the Peace Corps, as an institution, has supported Peace Corps volunteers.

Despite critical reports by its own Inspector General, the General Accountability Office, and prior Congressional hearings, Peace Corps' safety and security failures have been a recurrent problem with tragic consequences for thousands of volunteers. Some who seek to ignore those problems have asserted that volunteer service, itself, is inherently risky as an excuse for lax and ineffective safety and security measures. That attitude is unacceptable.

Clearly, the conditions under which Peace Corps volunteers serve present unique challenges. Volunteers are often deployed to areas with restricted access to reliable communication, with limited or no police and medical services. Volunteers may have only a basic understanding of local language and culture, and may be viewed as relatively wealthy - becoming targets for criminal activity. According to an April 2010 audit report by the Peace Corps Inspector General:

> "If compared to public colleges and universities, Peace Corps would rank first for the most robberies, second for most burglaries, and seventh for most aggravated assaults.
>
> "Further, in comparison to crime statistics reported by countries around the world, Peace Corps Volunteers experience higher rates of rape and burglary than any of the 86 countries that responded to the United Nations crime statistics analysis."

Historically, the media have downplayed the dangers of serving in the Peace Corps, and have underreported and overlooked criticism of the Peace Corps. Recently, this immunization has started to subside. In 2003, the *Dayton Daily News* released its seven-part series entitled, "*Casualties of Peace*." Former *Dayton Daily News* editor, Jeffrey Bruce stated:

> "the extent of this safety problem has been disguised for decades, partly because the assaults occurred thousands of miles away, partly because 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 the Peace Corps."

Earlier this year, on January 14, the ABC television news program, *20/20*, exposed the Peace Corps' failures regarding the reporting of sexual assault and rape, which spurred many victims to come forward about the mishandling of their cases. According to dozens of disturbing affidavits received by our Committee, the Peace Corps' mishandling of rape and assault spans over four decades. Several of the affidavits are from volunteers currently serving in the Peace Corps. The affidavits received by the Committee were obtained by First Response Action, a support group of volunteers who were victims of rape or assault. The affidavits establish five basic themes:

- Volunteers are generally inadequately trained on sexual assault issues;
- Volunteers are often placed in dangerous situations;
- The Peace Corps' in-country response often fails to meet survivors' needs;
- Upon return to the United States, survivors often receive hostile, rather than supportive treatment; and
- Institutional obstacles often prevent survivors from receiving long-term medical and mental health care.

Without objection, I would like to include these affidavits in the record.

At this time, I would also like to include, without objection, a statement from returned volunteers, Chuck Ludlam and Paula Hirschoff, who have been advocates for reform to address problems with the Peace Corps, including safety and security.

Further, without objection, I would like to include for the record a statement from the Building Bridges Coalition, a consortium of 300 international volunteer organizations, regarding Peace Corps safety and security.

Finally, I will be handing Mr. Williams a letter from a constituent of mine who was serving in the Peace Corps but was recently terminated. I am asking the Peace Corps to explain why it did not accommodate the medical concerns of this older volunteer.

At our hearing today, three returned Peace Corps volunteers have made the difficult decision to testify about their traumatic experiences, and I commend them for their bravery, and continued commitment to effect positive change in the Peace Corps. We will also hear from the mother of a Peace Corps volunteer who did not return home. Lois Puzey will testify about her courageous daughter and how the Peace Corps failed Kate when she reported the rape and abuse of students for whom she cared so deeply.

Following this testimony, we will hear from Peace Corps Director Aaron Williams, and Peace Corps Inspector General Kathy Buller. Our goal is to find ways to address these problems so that future Peace Corps volunteers will not fear for their safety.

And we are joined today by Senator Isakson from Georgia, whose constituent is Lois Puzey. Senator Isakson's presence is another indication of his commitment to securing justice for Lois's daughter, Kate, who was killed during her service as a Peace Corps volunteer in Benin.

I now recognize the Ranking Member, Mr. Berman, for his opening remarks.

Mr. BERMAN. Well, thank you very much, Madam Chairman. And thank you for calling this important hearing. And I want to second your commendation of Mrs. Puzey and the witnesses, other witnesses, who are coming forward to talk about something which cannot be that easy to talk about in such a public setting. We very much appreciate your courage in doing this.

This year, as you noted, marks the 50th anniversary of the Peace Corps. Since its founding, nearly 200,000 volunteers have served in 139 countries around the world, promoting community-based development, sharing American values, and enriching our own nation by bringing knowledge about other countries and cultures back to the United States.

The distinguished list of Peace Corps alumni includes 15 Members of Congress, 4 current members; cabinet members; ambassadors; noted journalists; scientists; educators; and many others, who are leaders in their fields making an impact around the globe.

No agency with such a modest budget has done more than the Peace Corps to extend America's presence in nearly every part of the world. For that reason, it has enjoyed the strong support of both Republican and Democratic administrations. However, all of us were deeply troubled by the recent ABC news 20/20 segment, which detailed the circumstances surrounding the murder of a volunteer in the West African nation of Benin and the sexual assault of volunteers in a number of different countries.

The Puzey family was not provided adequate support after the death of their daughter, from the manner in which they were notified to the way her personal effects were returned home to the lack of explanation of the circumstances that led to her murder.

By failing to provide Ms. Smochek with the protection she had requested or removing her from her site, Peace Corps left her open to an attack that could have cost her life. By providing inadequate training to Peace Corps staff and volunteers on how to prevent and

respond to sexual assaults, the volunteer community is left vulnerable to physical and psychological trauma.

We have a profound obligation to our volunteers to do everything possible, not only to improve their safety and to prevent these crimes from occurring but to respond effectively in emergency situations. There is no excuse for failing to treat survivors with dignity and compassion or for leaving families in the dark.

Our job today is to identify the gaps and flaws in the current system, and lay the groundwork for fixing them in a reasonable bipartisan manner. The brave and selfless men and women who chose to spend more than 2 years of their lives as volunteers, often in some of the most remote places on Earth, deserve nothing less.

Indeed, the volunteers are and always will be the Peace Corps' most precious asset. Is the agency doing all it can to protect them? Is it minimizing risks the volunteers face in the field? Is it providing the kind of training, preparation, and support they need for emergency situations? Is it using the best protocols to respond to sexual assault and protect survivors? When the worst happens, are they treating the families with compassion and respect?

To help answer some of these questions, we are honored to have with us today the mother of Kate Puzey, the volunteer murdered in Benin, and several former volunteers that were the victims of sexual assault. We know it takes enormous courage for you to tell your stories in this very public setting, as I mentioned.

We all share the goal of making the Peace Corps of the next 50 years even better than the Peace Corps of the last 50. It is now our duty to ensure that this agency lives up to the idealism, innovation, and generosity embodied in the volunteers.

Finally, let me just say that it takes a certain kind of person to join the Peace Corps, a certain pioneering spirit, to leave behind all the comforts they have known for their entire lives and enter the unknown to serve others. These individuals live with those who are less fortunate than themselves. They see the poverty that grips billions around the world and join them in their struggle to make a small business work, make their crop yields better, gain access to clean water, combat deadly and debilitating disease. For this service, it is not only the United States but the world that owes Peace Corps volunteers a debt of gratitude.

I hope we can learn today about how to improve the Peace Corps and work together in the bipartisan manner that has always marked our approach to the agency. We must do this to honor the courage of the people who are speaking out on these issues, to acknowledge the others who have yet to come forward and to respect the legacy of an agency that has done so much good in the world.

Thank you, Madam Chairman. I look forward to the witnesses' testimony.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Berman.

The members are recognized for 1 minute for opening statements if they choose to. Congressman Gallegly of California?

Mr. GALLEGLY. In the interest of time so we can get to our witnesses, I would yield.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you.

Congressman Sires of New Jersey?

Mr. SIRES. Thank you, Madam Chair, Ranking Member Berman, for holding this, today's hearing.

Earlier this year the Peace Corps celebrated its 50th anniversary. We have had over 200,000 volunteers serving in over 139 countries. I am incredibly proud for the volunteers' service and the lasting contribution you are making to improve the lives of people in communities where you are serving. Because of my strong support for the work of the Peace Corps, I am very concerned about the history of safety and security that threatens the Peace Corps volunteers all over the world.

I am looking forward to hearing from Director Williams and Inspector Buller about the progress made by Peace Corps regarding volunteer safety. And I would like to thank former Peace Corps volunteers for being here today to share the stories with us.

And I also am interested in knowing what the process is when a volunteer is in danger. How do you remove that volunteer from a dangerous place? I am very curious how you determine that.

And I yield back.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much.

Judge Poe of Texas?

Mr. POE. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Peace Corps, those American angels abroad, the best we have in this country. They represent everything that is good and right about this nation. And you are sitting right here on the front row. Thank you for your service and your courage.

And when you go abroad, a Peace Corps volunteer goes abroad, and a crime is committed against them, this nation needs to be very proactive in making sure that you are taken care of. Too often in the affidavits that I have read, the Peace Corps volunteer when assaulted becomes the accused. Peace Corps has blamed you for the crimes committed against you.

As a former judge, let me just say this. Sexual assault is never, never the fault of the victim. And our system, our country must totally support victims abroad, take care of them, bring them back, give them justice because justice is what we do in this country.

Thank you for being here.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Just the way it is. Thank you, Judge.

Mr. Cicilline, Rhode Island?

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Madam Chairman. And I thank you for holding this hearing and thank our ranking member. I welcome the witnesses.

And I want to apologize in advance. I am not able to stay for the entire hearing. But I want to assure you that I have read all of the written testimony and will follow up with you. But I really want to thank you for being here to share these stories. I think we all recognize the Peace Corps has done extraordinary things, as Mr. Berman described. But this is a serious issue.

I am proud that in my district, we have Brown University, which ranks right near the top in terms of providing volunteers to the Peace Corps. We have a responsibility to ensure that every single person who makes the sacrifice to serve in the Peace Corps, that we do everything we can, everything humanly possible to assure their safety.

And the testimony that you provided in your written testimony is very disturbing to me and I think to all members of this committee. And I thank you for being here to share your stories and thank you for your service to our country.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, sir.

Ms. Schmidt of Ohio?

Ms. SCHMIDT. Thank you. And, first off, I want to thank these brave women that are here before us, Ms. Smochek, Ms. Clark, and Ms. Koenen, and, most importantly, Mrs. Puzey, for what you have given in order to allow peace to go abroad. You know, 60 percent of the folks that are in the Peace Corps are women. And you are truly angels and ambassadors.

And your three-pronged mission of a better understanding of Americans to help people understand the folks in America and abroad, that is commendable. But when you go over there, you are supposed to go over there knowing you are going to be safe, and that if something is to happen to you, that you are going to be taken care of. And I think that is the big blemish in this whole debate.

I live close to Dayton. I read that article many years ago and couldn't believe that it was happening. And now that I serve in Congress, I have the ability to do something about it. With your help, we will.

Thank you.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Jean.

Ms. Wilson of Florida?

Ms. WILSON. Thank you, Madam Chair and Ranking Member Berman, for holding this hearing.

Founded 50 years ago, in 1961, by John F. Kennedy, the Peace Corps has sought to meet its legislative mandate of promoting world peace and friendship by sending American volunteers to serve at the grass roots level in villages and towns and corners of the globe. Living and working with ordinary people, volunteers have contributed in a variety of capacities, such as teachers, environmental specialists, health promoters, and small business advisers, to improving the lives of those they serve and helping others understand American culture.

To date nearly 200,000 Peace Corps volunteers have served in 139 countries. About 8,655 volunteers currently serve in 77 nations. In September 2005, Peace Corps response volunteers were deployed to assist Hurricane Katrina relief, the first time in Peace Corps history that volunteers were used domestically. More recently, they are serving in Haiti. And thank you.

While these volunteers serve our nation and our interests today, we will hear terrible stories of sexual assault and abuse to Peace Corps volunteers. It is important that we learn and know what changes the Peace Corps has done in the wake of these charges. Is a sexual assault protocol developed by the Peace Corps sufficient? And what can we do to keep our volunteers safe?

I look forward to the witness testimony. And thank you.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Ms. Wilson.

Mr. Marino of Pennsylvania?

Mr. MARINO. Thank you, Madam Chair.

As a former state and Federal prosecutor, I want to know why these good people were treated like they were and why these crimes weren't prosecuted and taken to the fullest extent.

I yield my time.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Higgins of New York?

Mr. HIGGINS. I thank the chair and just to thank the witnesses for being here. And the Peace Corps has done extraordinary work throughout the world for the past 50 years. We have an obligation, morally and otherwise, to ensure their safety. It is not what America does or says throughout the world. It is what America does. And the Peace Corps for 50 years has been the embodiment to the great, generous spirit of the American idea.

So I look forward to the hearing. And I yield back my time.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Kelly of Pennsylvania?

Mr. KELLY. Thank you, Madam Chair.

And, to the witnesses, I want to thank you so much for coming forward and having the fortitude to do it. It has got to be very difficult. As a father and a grandfather, I can tell you after reading your testimony I cannot believe that we put you in such danger and treated you so poorly. So I will tell you that I will dedicate my time—I have only been here 3 months—to following up on this and making sure that at any time this ever happens again, we follow through the way we need to follow through and keep our promise to you the way you kept your promise to our country.

I yield back my time. I look forward to your testimony.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Very good. Thank you.

Mr. Connolly of Virginia?

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

And, again, I want to express my welcome and appreciation for the courage of the women who have joined this panel today. Their stories are compelling and need to be addressed.

I also think, as the ranking member indicated, that this is the 50th anniversary of the Peace Corps. And, as Judge Poe said, Peace Corps makes us proud as Americans. Its presence overseas has been a marvelous testament about democracy, not in the abstract but in the faces of the men and women who have served, 200,000, as Mr. Sires said.

Sadly, we can't protect all of those volunteers, but the goal ought to be to do just that, to bring the risk factor to zero. We will never quite get to zero, but we need to explore today what we can do to ensure that this never happens to another volunteer and that, God forbid, when it does, the full brunt of U.S. resources on behalf of justice and bringing to justice the perpetrators of the crime are at work. So making Peace Corps even better ought to be the subject of this hearing and not cloud the 50 proud years of an organization that has done so well to the United States.

And I thank the chair.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, sir.

Dana Rohrabacher of California?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. One of the frustrating aspects of my job is that I have two hearings at exactly the same time that are both really important. I will be coming back and forth, but I will be

reading your full testimony. I want to thank you for coming forward.

And I think it is a sad commentary that women who went overseas to serve our country and to serve others found out when their most important time of need happened, that we weren't there. Their government was not there to serve them when they needed it the most. So I thank you for coming forward. You are going to permit us to perhaps correct a bad situation. That is what this is all about. And thank you for coming forward with your testimony.

And thank you, Madam Chair, for calling the hearing.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, sir.

Ms. Bass of California?

Ms. BASS. Yes, Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would first like to commend the strength of the women before us for your courage to come forward and advocate on such a delicate and important issue. I appreciate you coming to Washington this week to speak to Members of Congress and our staff and for testifying during this public hearing.

I know that you have all endured great hardships from these experiences and should be commended for your bravery and perseverance in ensuring that future generations of Peace Corps volunteers don't have to go through what you did. You inspire all of us with your actions and commitment to the Peace Corps, the vision of service and world diplomacy. We are grateful for your service during your time in this program and thereafter.

And I look forward to trying to understand what we can do to make sure the situation does not continue. Thank you.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, ma'am.

As I had pointed out in my opening remarks, Senator Isakson of Georgia is the senator who represents the Puzey family and would like to—we would be honored to give you a minute, Senator, to talk about Kate's case and anything you can help us with. Thank you for going back there next week and trying to see justice come.

Mr. ISAKSON. Madam Chairman and Congressman Berman, thank you very much for holding this hearing. I did not know Kate Puzey in life, but I attended her funeral service and met her coworkers and her family and heard about her extraordinary service to America and the pride she brought to my State of Georgia. And I made a commitment that I would do everything I could to see to it that Lois Puzey and her family first found closure and, second, the dissatisfaction that they had made an effort to see to it that what happened to Kate never happened to anybody again.

I am personally very grateful to each and every one of you for being here. I know the demands all of us have on our time. This is one of the most important things we can for the Americans and for the continuing integrity of the Peace Corps.

I am very honored you gave me a chance to speak. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, very much, Senator. Thank you.

And now I would like to welcome the witnesses for our first panel. Our first witness, Lois Puzey, is the mother of Catherine Irene Puzey, or Kate, who was murdered in Benin on March 12, 2009, while serving in the Peace Corps. Mrs. Puzey is here to serve

as Kate's voice, and to help prevent other families from experiencing tragedies like hers.

Mrs. Puzey married her husband in 1976 and had 2 children: David and Kate. Mrs. Puzey retired in 2006 from the Department of Defense school system after teaching military dependents for 30 years at both Augsburg High School in Germany, and Kadena Middle School in Okinawa, Japan.

I would like to express on behalf of our committee our sincerest condolences to you and your family, Mrs. Puzey. And thank you for appearing before us today.

Next we will hear from Carol Clark. Ms. Clark served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Nepal from 1984 until '85. She is currently an elementary school teacher in Jones County, North Carolina. She received her master's degree in counseling and a bachelor's degree in biology from Wake Forest University. She has served her community in many ways, including as a child enforcement agent and a community college counselor.

Ms. Clark, I would like to thank you for your bravery in sharing your experiences, we greatly appreciate your testimony this morning.

Also appearing before the committee today is Jessica Smochek, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Bangladesh in 2004. She is a board member of First Response Action, a non-profit organization that seeks change in the Peace Corps' sexual assault policies, and that provides assistance for former Peace Corps volunteers who have been victims of traumatic crime.

Ms. Smochek, thank you also for the courage to come before our committee today.

Next we will hear from Karestan Chase Koenen. Dr. Koenen was a Peace Corps volunteer from '91 to '93. She is a licensed clinical psychologist and she studies the interplay of genetic and environmental factors in the production of stress-related mental disorders, such as posttraumatic stress disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and depression.

Dr. Koenen, we are honored to have you here today.

Finally, we welcome, Ms. Jennifer Marsh. Ms. Marsh currently works for the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, RAINN, the nation's largest anti-sexual assault organization. RAINN manages the National Sexual Assault Online Hotline and coordinates services and communications with over 1,000 affiliate sexual assault service providers for the National Sexual Assault Telephone Hotline.

Thank you for taking the time to appear before us today, Ms. Marsh.

All of your statements have been made a part of the record and we ask that you summarize your statements to 5 minutes.

Mrs. Puzey, we will begin with you. Thank you. And if you could put your microphone close to your mouth, that helps us to hear you. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF MS. LOIS PUZEY, PARENT OF LATE PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER

Mrs. PUZEY. Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Berman, and committee members, my name is Lois Puzey. And I am here

today on behalf of my daughter Kate Puzey, who was murdered March 12, 2009 while serving with the Peace Corps in the West African Nation of Benin, and to urge Congress to enact legislation so that other families won't have to endure a similar tragedy.

Kate was a deeply compassionate, talented, upbeat person with a gift for understanding others. She was twice elected student council president in high school and graduated at the top of her class. After college, she joined the Peace Corps, serving as a teacher in a rural village.

Kate loved her time in Benin. She built close ties to her village. And she was considered a model volunteer. So how did a competent model volunteer become the victim of murder?

From the beginning, Kate was warned about the man who is now accused of killing her, Constant Bio, a local who taught in Kate's school. And he also worked part-time for the Peace Corps. Kate was told that Mr. Bio pressured students for sex and had bothered children with them.

Over time, her concern escalated. And then in February 2009, students and fellow teachers told Kate that Mr. Bio had actually raped two of his students and begged her to help. Despite the potential danger, Kate tried to do the right thing. Since her village had no Internet service and she was 12 hours away from the Benin country office, she traveled to the nearest work station, where she e-mailed the Peace Corps country director, asking for her assistance. Kate particularly emphasized the need for confidentiality because she understood that the brother of Mr. Bio worked in that same country office as the Peace Corps director.

Tragically, the way that Kate's e-mail was handled ultimately led to her death. The country director fired the accused without talking to Kate or without taking any kind of precautions or doing any kind of investigation on her own. She didn't take any precautions to remove Kate from her village. And, even worse, the Inspector General's report indicates that Kate's confidentiality was broken, apparently resulting in Mr. Bio's brother telling him about Kate's e-mail.

Kate was never alerted to the danger. Within a few days, she was murdered, it is believed by Mr. Bio and another man, both of whom were arrested along with Mr. Bio's brother.

Kate was the heart of our family. And our lives have been shattered.

The Peace Corps was very supportive during the funeral and made great efforts to honor her. That being said, we were shocked by many of our experiences with them after Kate's death. The Peace Corps provided us with very little information. They refused to answer our questions about the Inspector General's investigation and stopped all communication with us after 4 months, leaving us by ourselves to piece together what happened to our daughter.

Then 6 months after she died, her belongings arrived unaccompanied, simply left in our driveway in a FedEx delivery.

Finally, we discovered that before Kate's death, the Peace Corps had no whistleblower protections or training procedures in place. These were first drafted 2 weeks after she died.

Feeling abandoned, in 2010, we created our own advocacy group and have since had very improved relationships with the Peace

Corps, thanks to the leadership of Director Williams. However, the Peace Corps has never acknowledged the critical role it played in Kate's death. And we are also very painfully aware that if ABC's 20/20 had not investigated her murder, we would not have heard from them.

Our family deserves an honest acknowledgement and formal apology from the Peace Corps for any actions that contributed to our daughter's death.

After our experiences and hearing many other stories, we also believed that whistleblower and victims' rights legislation are urgently needed. In the past, the Peace Corps has believed, as I believe the present administration believes, that they have solved the problems, but, in truth, because of the transient nature of the leadership, efforts have eroded time after time. We do not want another family to endure the nightmare that we live daily, made worse by the recent news that those responsible for Kate's murder could go free. Legislation is the only way to ensure reforms remain consistent over time.

We still support the Peace Corps and understand the instinct to protect it, but by not acknowledging and addressing its systemic weaknesses, that doesn't help. That doesn't help the Peace Corps, nor its volunteers. Instead, please build a stronger, safer Peace Corps by passing legislation.

In the future, there will be another volunteer like my Kate, who will want to do the right thing. Honor Kate's sacrifice by doing the right thing now so that future volunteers can serve safely.

[The prepared statement of Mrs. Puzey follows:]

House Foreign Affairs Committee
Testimony of Catherine Lois Puzey

Mother of Slain Peace Corps Volunteer Kate Puzey
Regarding the Urgent Need for Peace Corps Reform

May 11, 2011

Catherine Irene Puzey, or "Kate", was murdered on March 12, 2009, while serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Benin, West Africa. As her mother, I am coming forward now to act as my daughter's voice and to help prevent future tragedies for other families.

My statement is divided into four sections:

1. Background information, including a brief biography of Kate, her purpose for entering the Peace Corps, her relationship with the administrative staff in the Benin Peace Corps Office, and her experiences as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

2. Information regarding the circumstances that led to Kate's death in March 2009.

3. A description of our family's experiences with the Peace Corps after Kate's death, and how these led us to seek legislative action assuring that other families would not experience the unnecessary suffering that we endured after losing Kate.

4. Finally, a review of proposals to help strengthen the Peace Corps, specifically by enhancing the rights of PC Volunteers who become victims or whistleblowers, and why it is essential that these reforms be legislated to ensure that they are properly followed and remain consistent over time.

Section 1: Background Information on Kate Puzey

A. Biographical Sketch

Catherine Irene Puzey, or 'Kate', was born on June 19, 1984 in Augsburg, Germany, the second child of Harry & Lois Puzey, career teachers for the Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DODDS). Kate lived in Augsburg until the age of nine, when our family moved to Okinawa, Japan. From an early age, Kate showed a remarkably compassionate and talented spirit. In a DODDS high school with over 2000 students, she was elected Student Council President both her junior and senior years. After graduating at the top of her class in 2002, Kate attended The College of William and Mary, and majored in sociology with a minor in business. She studied abroad her junior year in France at the University of Montpelier, developing the proficiency in French that would later allow her to become a teacher for the Peace Corps in Benin.

Kate dedicated much of her life and talents towards caring for others. She worked with underprivileged children throughout college, assisted refugees for a year with the International Rescue Committee following graduation, and then joined the Peace Corps in July 2007. Throughout her life, Kate was known as an unusually kind and giving person; she possessed and nurtured a gift for embracing people of all walks of life, a talent for understanding the nuances of human nature, and a delight in living life to the fullest.

B. Purpose for Joining the Peace Corps

In her application to join the Peace Corps, Kate was asked to write an Aspiration Statement.

Here is an excerpt of her words:

"I consider myself an optimistic realist. In a world of many problems, you can't just stand by at a macro-level and wish them all away. Enabling progress requires getting down and working alongside those who know best what is halting it in the first place. Forging relationships with local communities in need, while providing them necessary support and human resources, seems to me an excellent strategy. It is one that is represented by the work of PCVs around the world.

C. Kate's Experiences with the Benin Peace Corps Headquarters

During her time in Benin, Kate repeatedly told us about problems she observed with the Benin Peace Corps staff, including what she described as a lack of professionalism and a disconnection between top-level staff and Peace Corps Volunteers in the field. But as an "optimistic realist" Kate still worked to cultivate a good working relationship with them. When she initially arrived in Benin her training was provided by some Volunteers in their second year of service who were often cynical and pessimistic about what they were accomplishing and the senior staff. In a 2007 Survey of PC Volunteers, the performance of this office was ranked in the bottom ten per cent. Volunteers were frequently frustrated by the management style of the Country Director, as well as **a lack of confidentiality** within the office. The following year, Kate was nominated to help

train the incoming class of Volunteers; she strived to be more upbeat and professional with them, and by all accounts did so – despite the continuing problems with the administrative staff.

D. Kate's Experiences as a Volunteer

Like many Volunteers, Kate embraced the challenges of Peace Corps life. She felt fortunate to have been selected to work in education, and she enjoyed her work as an English teacher; her village of Badjoudae was also considered a desirable place to be stationed. Kate committed herself to becoming fully integrated into her community and, over the next eighteen months, she built a strong relationship of trust and affection with the students and villagers. Kate was particularly close with the women and children. She helped create a girls club and soccer team. She also worked on projects at school and within the local community, such as a celebration called the 'Day of the African Child'. We will always take pride in how widely respected Kate was both within her village and as a recognized model among the Peace Corps Volunteers.

Section 2: Circumstances Leading to Kate's death.

How did such a conscientious and widely loved Volunteer become the victim of murder?

A. Sexism in West Africa: A Clash of Cultures

Having lived and traveled outside the United States, Kate understood the clash of western values with cultures in which women are still subjugated. In these situations, Peace Corps volunteers face a delicate balance, seeking to respect the mores of the local culture, while coming to terms with acts that would be considered wrong in any culture. Even though Kate respected these cultural differences and possessed exceptional people skills, she struggled morally with such issues throughout the time that she lived in Benin.

Kate worked diligently to gain the respect of her predominately male teaching colleagues, who initially did not take her seriously because she was a woman. She witnessed how women were treated as second class citizens with no voice, valued mainly by their ability to produce children and to be obedient to men, who often did not act in their best interest. While seeking to be respectful of the cultural gender differences in Benin, Kate and other Volunteers worked with the girls in their communities to help educate and empower them. However, one situation presented Kate with a cultural dilemma that greatly troubled her and that she was unable to resolve.

B. Kate's Accused Killer

From almost her first day in Badjoudae, Kate was warned about the aggressive sexual behavior of a man—Constant BIO—who is now accused of killing her. This man taught at the school where Kate was assigned to teach. He also worked for the Peace Corps during the summers, helping to provide language training to the new Volunteers. In this role, he regularly ignored the Peace Corps policy prohibiting sexual relations with the Volunteers and had a reputation for making aggressive, unwanted advances. Some saw him as a charming womanizer who used females for his needs and then discarded them; others viewed him simply as a sexual predator.

More worrisome was his attitude toward the students in the village. When Kate arrived in 2007, she was warned by the exiting Volunteer who served there before her to watch out for this man. It was rumored that he pressured his female students for sexual favors and had fathered at least two children with them. In our culture this would be unacceptable behavior and a criminal act, but in West Africa the lines are less clear. Over time, Kate became increasingly concerned as she saw his behavior become more aggressive towards female students. She talked to the School Director, who was unwilling to confront Constant. She also talked to us, her parents, and her brother on numerous occasions about the moral dilemma she faced.

When I visited Kate in Benin during the summer of 2008, she and other Volunteers had been hoping that, given some downsizing, her accused killer would not be hired again as a language facilitator for that summer's Peace Corps training. However he was rehired, presumably because of his brother's influence as the Benin Assistant Peace Corps Director for the Business Sector.

During the fall and winter of 2008, the accused killer's behavior clearly became unacceptable. He started coming to school drunk; his students often refused to go to his class. He developed a reputation for becoming violent when he was drinking. Finally in February 2009, teachers and students told Kate that he had actually raped two of the female students, and begged for her to help with having him removed from his job.

C. Report of Allegations to the Benin Peace Corps Director

Kate wanted to prevent Constant from causing further harm, but she was unsure how to proceed. She had received no training in how to be a whistle blower and **there were no clear outlined steps for her to follow**. This situation was made even more precarious by the fact that this man's brother worked as an Assistant Director in the local Peace Corps Benin Headquarters. Kate was in a particularly vulnerable position, isolated with the accused killer in her village eight hours from Cotonou, Benin's largest city and the location of the Peace Corps Country Office.

In late February 2009, Kate decided to travel to the closest Peace Corps work-station several hours away at Natitingou because she had no electricity or internet service in her village. There, with the assistance of some fellow Volunteers, she decided to write a very professional request for assistance to the Peace Corps Benin Country Director. Here are excerpts from the email:
\

"Please believe I'm not someone who likes to create problems, but this has been weighing heavily on me. I've loved my time as a volunteer and it's important to me that Peace Corps remain a respected organization in the eyes of our host country. This man is not someone I want representing Peace Corps to the Beninese community."

"I've had the opportunity to observe his behavior at work and around town. My concerns about this person were first raised by repeated stories of him harassing/sleeping with students, coming to work inebriated, etc. I know for a fact that this school year alone students have refused to attend his classes on several occasions because of his lack of professionalism."

"For obvious reasons, it's important to me that I remain anonymous in this situation. *However, please feel free to contact me (cell phone 979011962). I would appreciate if you could respond, even briefly just to let me know you received this email."*

We believe that Kate saw this as merely a first step towards resolving the problem and thus don't believe she felt she was in immediate danger. Volunteers have told us that Kate presumed the Director would contact her directly, and then Kate could elaborate on her message. Kate hoped the Director would thereafter launch an investigation into the allegations, which could lead to the accused being removed from his position both at the school and with the Peace Corps. Finally, since Kate was scheduled to complete her work in the village in only a few more months, she thought that these actions might well happen after she had left the village altogether in order to protect her from retaliation.

D. Kate's Murder

Instead, the events that followed would lead to Kate's death. When Kate sent her email, the Country Director was out of the office for a week. Then, on March 2nd, she sent Kate a short response to her email saying she would discuss the issue with the training director. On March 6th, the Country Director sent Kate the following email:

"Dear Kate,

Given the below information. Peace Corps will not renew Mr. Constant BIO's contract. He will receive a letter shortly to let him know this, as well as the reason why. We are also looking into how to prevent him from continuing this behavior at this school. We will take care not to mention you or involve you in any way.

Thank you again for drawing our attention to this matter. We definitely don't want someone like this working for the Peace Corps."

Unfortunately, Kate never saw these emails, and therefore was completely unaware of the potential danger she faced. At the time they were sent, she was back in her village, where there was no internet, and no way to receive email. This should have been well known to the Country Director, as both Kate and many other Volunteers had consistently requested that they be contacted by phone since many of them had no local internet access.

Furthermore, although Kate had stressed the importance of confidentiality – knowing that the brother of the man she was accusing worked in the Peace Corps local headquarters – and despite the Country Director's promise that this confidentiality would be respected, the Peace Corps' Inspector General report later determined that **Kate's confidentiality was breached**. Indeed, the brother of the accused killer apparently told Constant BIO that Kate's complaint had led to his firing within only a few days.

The Peace Corps Benin Country Director mishandled this issue by:

- **Not talking to Kate directly before taking action.**
- **Taking no precautions to protect Kate, such as removing her from a situation with an obvious potential for danger**
- **Simply terminating the accused without any further process or investigation**
- **Allowing Kate's confidentiality to be breached, despite the contrary request, the potential for retaliation, and the risk the brothers would communicate**

Although she did not know it, our precious Kate was in horrific danger. On the night of Wednesday, March 11th, 2009, Kate decided to sleep on her locked porch, a normal practice in Benin during the hot season. It is believed that the accused, Constant BIO, probably drunk and angry, slipped onto Kate's porch that night and murdered her. It is also believed that he was assisted in some way by his neighbor, who was seen drinking with him that night; both have been held in jail for the crime. Also the man's brother, the Benin Assistant Peace Corps Director, currently continues to be jailed.

On the morning of March 12, 2009, my husband, who was hospitalized at the time, was called by the Director of Peace Corps with the horrifying news that Kate was dead. However, we were given no details or explanation.

Kate was the heart of our family, and our great source of joy. Shocked and devastated, our lives are shattered, and no words can truly convey the anguish we have endured.

Section 3: Our Family's Interactions with the Peace Corps Following Kate's Death

In our experience, Peace Corps volunteers and staff are often people who are smart, talented, and compassionate. The Peace Corps was supportive during Kate's funeral, and they have done many things to honor her over the past two years. They have agreed to assist us financially with the cost of returning to Benin if the murder trial is held and within the past year have finally taken steps to correct some of the policy failures that led to Kate's tragic death and our initial negative experiences as a grieving family.

However, this was not at all our experience in the first year after Kate's death.

A. Negative Experiences with the Peace Corps *[March 2009 - October 2010]*

At the beginning, our expectations were that the Peace Corps would be forthright with us, acknowledge their mistakes, and be there to advocate for us with the Benin justice system to see that the accused (even though two were Peace Corps employees) would be brought to justice. We also fully expected that after fifty years of operation and the deaths of over 280 Volunteers, the Peace Corps would have an efficient family support system in place, with reasonable services to assist grieving families, and expected honest transparency in regards to the circumstances leading to Kate's murder.

It therefore came as a shock when we felt that our family and Kate had been abandoned. Negative experiences in the first year after her death included the following:

- **We were left on our own to piece together what happened to Kate**.
  The Peace Corps was extremely reluctant to give us ***any*** information about the circumstances of Kate's death, or to even assist us in gathering the facts ourselves. They wouldn't honor our request to see the initial email that had started this nightmare; we had to retrieve it ourselves. All the information we learned came from Kate's friends among the Volunteers and villagers, and eventually representatives from the Justice Department. Ironically, Brian Ross from ABC 20/20 received much more information from the attorney *defending* Constant BIO then we—the victim's family—did from the organization we had entrusted with our daughter's safety.
- **We were, likewise, denied any information from the investigation by the Peace Corps Inspector General Report**
  We knew there had been an investigation of the Benin Country Office by the Peace Corps Inspector General, but we were denied access to any of the results, and felt entirely 'left in the dark'. We only heard through Volunteers that new confidentiality and sexual harassment training was provided to the Benin office staff after Kate's death, and that the former Country Director resigned and moved to another government job.
- **The Peace Corps stopped all communication with us after four months, stating that it had no part in the investigation.**
  This blackout of communication continued until we finally requested a meeting with Director Williams a year after Kate's death, in March 2010.
- **No Peace Corps representative ever came personally to deliver the awful news of Kate's death**, even though we live less than an hour from the Atlanta regional office. As I mentioned before, my husband, who was hospitalized at the time, was the first to learn of Kate's death.
- **The majority of Kate's effects arrived unaccompanied six months after her death; they were simply dropped in our driveway by a FedEx delivery truck without any condolences from the Peace Corps.**
- **There was no support or counseling service provided** to help my husband, son, or I deal with the grief and the shock of the violence that had happened to our daughter.
- **We were heartbroken to discover that Peace Corps, unbelievably, had no whistleblower policies or training procedures for Volunteers.**
  After fifty years, such policies were finally proposed two weeks after Kate's death, and not officially implemented until January 2011.

This shocking treatment by the Peace Corps presented us with an unexpected dilemma. Kate loved the Peace Corps, despite her concerns about the Benin country staff, but we felt completely abandoned by the organization she had so respected at a time when we really desperately needed their support and honesty.

Eight months after Kate's murder, my husband's cancer returned, this time as terminal. At the same time, the trial of those accused in the murder was postponed.

After so much heavy grieving and feeling betrayed, we finally decided to stop being victimized, hoping in vain for support from the Peace Corps. As a family we developed an Action Plan to discover what had really happened to Kate and to assure that justice was done on her behalf. We created "Kate's Voice", an advocacy group made up of family, some of Kate's college friends, and fellow Benin Volunteers to 'speak for her' since she could no longer advocate for herself, and to seek resolution for our family.

In late February 2010, we traveled to Washington DC to meet with Director Williams and other staff at the Peace Corps Headquarters. We also scheduled meetings with several staffers of Congressmen who are involved with oversight of Peace Corps, and with Georgia Senator Johnny Isakson, who has been our strongest supporter from the onset. *(Senator Isakson attended Kate's memorial service, has honored her in speeches on the Senate floor, and has been a valuable emissary with the State Department and Benin Justice System. We want to extend a special thanks to him - he continues to be our strongest advocate, and has proposed and continues to pursue legislation for us.)*

The goals of our trip were simple:

- To request that Peace Corps provide greater transparency with our family regarding the circumstances of Kate's death and also to acknowledge any actions on its part that might have contributed to her death.
- To request that the Peace Corps enact some policy changes to ensure that other families would not suffer experiences similar to our family; these include whistleblower protections and more sensitive, supportive policies for families and Peace Corps Volunteer victims of rape or sexual assault
- To bring attention to Kate's story, in hopes that this would help to focus attention to the trial (which still has not been scheduled after two years)

Director Williams, whose leadership had begun in the fall of 2009, seemed unaware and shocked when we told him the details surrounding Kate's death, but also receptive to some of our policy proposals. We continued our discussions through a series of letters over the next few months. However, the Peace Corps remained reluctant to answer any questions relating to Kate's death or even to allow us to meet with the Peace Corps Inspector General. The Peace Corps then claimed it was severely restricted in what could it could tell us because they were concerned about compromising the trial, though we have felt this was also due to unwarranted concern about legal action by our family. In either event, we continued to feel that the Peace Corps was not being forthright with us or taking us very seriously, and it was very hurtful to see the wide gap between the information that was available (such as was later provided by the accused killer's attorney to a journalist) and that which was provided to our family by the Peace Corps.

In the summer of 2010, eighteen months after Kate death, we finally were able to meet directly with the Peace Corps Inspector General, Kathy Buller, to seek some answers. However, Mrs. Buller could still not answer most of our questions, although she did confirm that Kate's confidentiality had been breached by personnel in the Benin Peace Corps Office. She said we would be able to have a copy of her report after the trial, and told us that she had not allowed the two agents responsible for the investigation to accompany her because she didn't want them to provide us with "too much information."

B. Improved Experiences with Peace Corps *[October 2010 – March 2011]*

In early October 2010, an investigative team from ABC's 20/20 began researching Kate's death for the program that aired in January 2011. We will always be grateful for their commitment to tell Kate's story because this finally led to a truly improved relationship with the Peace Corps. The new Peace Corps Director of Operations, Carrie Hessler-Radelet, agreed to be interviewed by them and also contacted our family. She has since become a compassionate advocate on our behalf. In November 2010 the Peace Corps finally began to act as a liaison for us concerning the trial. Mrs. Radelet also made us aware of recently implemented changes related to our concerns. She advised us that Peace Corps has undertaken the following actions:

- The Counseling and Outreach Unit for Volunteers and Families was created by expanding the scope of work of the previous Office of Special Services
- The Peace Corps has formalized procedures for notifying families of the death of a volunteer and the return of the volunteer's personal possessions. This is to include a phone call from the Director of the Agency, an offer of an immediate visit by a grief counselor, the return of personal possessions by a Peace Corps employee, and support by a team of clinical psychologists.
- The Office of the Inspector General has conducted an audit of the Peace Corps' Safety and Security procedures.
- The Peace Corps has strengthened its staff and Volunteer training in Safety and Security and held the first ever global training for Safety & Security Coordinators and Safety & Security Officers in Washington DC last summer.
- There are new policies on the handling of confidential information and Volunteer allegations, with ongoing training and reinforcement of these policies for both staff and Volunteers.
- There is now enforcement of a policy requiring background checks for all Peace Corps staff and contract workers.
- The Peace Corps has improved lines of communication and technical support to Posts from the Office of Safety and Security.
- A multi-disciplinary Peace Corps Sexual Assault Working Group was created to strengthen agency protocols and recommend new strategies for addressing sexual assault prevention and response, handle difficult cultural issues, and better support Volunteers in the field.
- There are now very strict guidelines for handling confidential information. There are written guidelines for both Volunteers and Staff in their handbooks that clarify the process, and these are reinforced with every training.

Section 4: Next Steps - Legislation, An Apology and Justice for Kate

Our family and the rest of the "Kate's Voice" advocacy group are pleased to see that some changes are being made; we want to strongly note that **we believe in the mission of the Peace Corps and are in no way seeking to cause it harm**. We want it to be the strongest organization possible and to address issues that could undermine its potential.

However, we still have some unanswered questions about the circumstances surrounding Kate's death, and we request that the Peace Corps be completely transparent with us. Moreover, **we are also painfully aware that if we hadn't reached out to Peace Corps, and if ABC 20/20 had not investigated, they would not have reached out to us.**

A. The Peace Corps Administration Failed Kate and Our Family

To this day Peace Corps still has not honestly acknowledged the critical role that the Benin Country Director and office played in Kate's death. She trusted them to assist her and instead their mismanagement, unintentionally, placed her in harm's way. The report of Peace Corps IG confirms that there was a confidentiality breach in the Benin office. **The Peace Corps, including the present administration, has never taken any honest responsibility for this or acknowledged any mistakes on their part.**

More disappointing is what they did do. The Peace Corps, including the current administration, not only did not assist us in our investigation to find out what happened to our beloved Kate, they actually took steps to make it more difficult. We know for a fact that the staff at the Benin office, including the director at the time of her death and the director afterwards, were told not to have any contact with us. If any correspondence was necessary, they were required to first send it to Peace Corps headquarters for their approval and editing. In all cases, the Peace Corps treated us like a potential legal or public relations problem rather than a grieving family suffering an unthinkable tragedy.

Our family wants and deserves for Peace Corps to have a painful but honest conversation with us about its actions at the time of Kate's death and afterwards. We feel we deserve total transparency and **a formal apology for any actions that contributed to her death**.

B. Legislation is Necessary to Ensure Policy Reforms are Followed

Finally, after our unexpectedly negative experiences, over a year of research, and hearing the stories of many current and former Volunteers, we firmly believe that legislation is necessary in order to ensure that our aims of protecting Volunteers and supporting any victims and their families are fulfilled. Here is why we have reached that conclusion:

- The current Peace Corps staff has worked diligently within this past year to initiate some necessary reforms. However, given the 5-year limit on tenure with the Peace Corps, we want to make sure these remain in place over time and that such policies are strictly followed; this has been a notable problem in the past. Legislation is the only way to guarantee this consistency remains over time.

- Mandating additional reporting requirements to Congress by the Peace Corps could help ensure more transparency so that critical problems can be identified and addressed more promptly, instead of waiting until after a tragedy occurs.
- We believe that Peace Corps Volunteers who become victims of violence while serving should be supported, much as victims who serve in the armed forces are provided with support. We believe this is more likely to happen if Peace Corps victims' rights are legislated rather than left to the discretion of the organization.
- Congress had an opportunity to install whistleblower protections that, if in place, might have actually protected Volunteers like Kate, but unfortunately did not enact the 2007 Dodd Bill with these protections. We hope and trust that since the tragedies that can occur without sufficient oversight are now more clearly known that this Congress will see why passing such legislation is so critically needed.

C. Our Legislative Proposals

1. **Whistleblower Protections:** The Peace Corps made no effort to establish any whistleblower procedures during its fifty years until after our daughter's death. It took Kate's murder for them to act. We also know that there is a history of policies lapsing over time due to the Peace Corps frequent turnover created by the five-year only employment regulation. Therefore, we strongly feel that the Peace Corps Staff Manual Section 271 should be codified into law. It covers many aspects of whistleblowers protections and allegations of mismanagement. However, we believe at least one additional requirement should be added under 5.0 Handling Allegations and Concerns:

- If the Volunteer is in possible danger she/he should be promptly removed from the site. The Peace Corps should be required to investigate the safety of the site before the Volunteer can return. (This would be applicable not only in a whistleblower situation, but also for any serious threat to Volunteers of sexual/physical assault).

2. Support for Victims and Victims Families: A systemic weakness for Peace Corps is their handling of victims and their families when things go wrong. The Peace Corps has a moral duty to compassionately handle victims and their families, and Congress needs to monitor this through legislation. We have been supporting First Response Action, a group of assault victims, since before the 20/20 program aired in January. We think it would be advantageous to merge their proposals as described in the *Peace Corps Volunteer and Safety and Security Act of 2011* with Senator Isakson's proposals to better support grieving families of fallen Volunteers, enhance whistle blower protections and increase reporting requirements (as listed herein).

3. Reinforced Quality Standards: The Peace Corps has already implemented some needed policy changes internally. However, the Peace Corps still needs to standardize the quality and efficiency of its country offices so that *all* are well managed; all sites should be monitored frequently so that problems can be addressed in a timely manner. Congress can help reinforce and assure this by requesting from the Peace Corps the following additional reporting requirements:

a. Annual Volunteer Survey and any action(s) taken as a result of that survey
b. The results of any reviews of PC Country Directors and country programs
c. The annual report on volunteer safety and violent acts against Volunteers
d. Investigations of crimes against Volunteers, including an evaluation of whether the Peace Corps Inspector General should be made independent once again from the PC, and/or take the lead in such investigations.
e. The annual rate of early termination among Volunteers, including as much demographic data as possible. This should also be available for applicants to the Peace Corps as well.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. While nothing will ever be able to bring our beloved Kate back to us, we hope that Congress will work together to enact legislation this year to help reform and strengthen the Peace Corps, so that it can fully meet its potential and honor its great legacy. More importantly, we hope you will do so to ensure that no other Volunteer or family has to endure what our family and others have had to endure. We believe that legislation would honor Kate's memory.

D. Justice for Kate in Benin

Finally, though it is perhaps outside of the purview of this specific hearing, I feel I should also share some devastating news that our family recently received regarding the trial in Benin of those accused in Kate's murder:

After two previously judges ruled that enough evidence existed for the accused to be brought to trial (which is akin to a sentencing hearing in our system) a third judge took the, apparently, highly unusual step of reversing course and ruled last month that enough evidence did *not* exist to proceed to the final stage. This was of course shocking news for our family, including my husband who had hoped to live to see those accused convicted Our family has been beyond horrified that the men responsible for our beloved Kate's death could possibly go free and face no justice at all.

We ask for any assistance possible in making requests to the Beninese government that this case be given utmost consideration and examination in hope that those responsible for Kate's murder will face some justice and not simply walk free.

* * * * *

Thank you again for your time and consideration. Following my oral testimony, I am happy to answer any questions regarding the issues that I have outlined here.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much. And we will do so. Thank you.

Ms. Clark?

STATEMENT OF MS. CAROL CLARK, FORMER PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER

Ms. CLARK. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. If you could push that middle button there and then hold it really closely to your mouth?

Ms. CLARK. Thank you, Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Berman, committee members.

My name is Carol Clark. I am a school teacher, a former Peace Corps volunteer, and a rape survivor. I thought I was alone in my experience, but when I learned that women today are still living through what I thought had been remedied decades ago, I knew I had to come forward.

In August 1984, 3 months after I graduated from college, I flew to Nepal ready to begin my lifelong dream of becoming a Peace Corps volunteer. The Peace Corps staff never talked to us about protecting ourselves from sexual harassment or assault. I never expected that it was the Peace Corps' own staff members from whom I would need the most protection.

Shortly after I arrived, our supervisor, the Nepalese Peace Corps program director, told female volunteers he expected sex in exchange for providing us with our living supplement checks. We told our Peace Corps country director about this, but he did nothing. He told us to grow a thicker skin and allowed the program director to continue supervising us.

Three months later, the program director raped me. Devastated and humiliated, I reported the rape to the Peace Corps medical officer. Instead of helping me, he told me he was disgusted with the volunteers and anything that happened to us was our own fault. I was not offered counseling.

The Peace Corps allowed my program director to continue supervising volunteers. And before the Peace Corps would assign me to a supervisor other than my rapist, I was forced to confront him in front of the Peace Corps medical director, who had chided me. Being forced to see this man again, to speak to him, and to convince the Peace Corps he had raped me was extremely traumatic, but I did it.

The Peace Corps took no action against my assailant, even after the forced confrontation. In fact, soon after I returned to service, he arrived unannounced at my village. It was clear he told his friends in the village they could violate me without fearing repercussions from the Peace Corps. He was right.

Soon after he left, a Nepalese official with whom I had worked told me my Peace Corps friend had told him how I like to have fun and demanded sex. When I refused, he picked up a knife, grabbed my neck, and choked me. He forced me to put a used, torn condom on him and began raping me. For the next 15 hours, he raped and beat me. For a long time, I prayed to live. And after that, I prayed to die.

When I finally escaped, I took my bike and rode, ran, and waded my way to Janakpur. From there I flew to Kathmandu, where I re-

ported the rape. The medical officer was angry with me for putting myself in a dangerous situation. He did not document the crime. And my attacker was not brought to justice.

The Peace Corps flew me back to Washington, DC, instructing me to tell others I was leaving because of dysentery. The program director who had initially raped me was given my home address and assigned to collect and mail me my belongings.

After I left, so many Nepal volunteers had been sexually assaulted or sexually harassed that they created their own safety survey. It showed numerous volunteers had been verbally and physically harassed and three more had been raped. They and I sought change from the Peace Corps.

My former Peace Corps regional director told me our stories had made a difference, the Peace Corps was creating new training materials and future volunteers would be safer, better prepared, and better treated. I believe the Peace Corps wanted to change then, as it does now, and that some improvements have been made, but the women sitting next to me prove those improvements were lacking.

In the last 20 years, according to Peace Corps' own data, Peace Corps volunteers reported more than 1,600 incidents of sexual assault, over 1,000 of which occurred in the last decade. Sadly, the three most recent years for which Peace Corps has released statistics have seen the greatest number of assaults.

Director Williams is a good man, but the Peace Corps has had almost 30 years since I was a volunteer to fix things on its own. And it has fallen short. The women trusting their lives to the Peace Corps cannot wait decades more for Peace Corps policies to organically mature. They need the immediate, permanent, and meaningful change that comes through legislative accountability. For that, we look to you.

Please help us build a better, stronger, safer Peace Corps so that our daughters can help the Peace Corps build a better world.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Clark follows:]

TESTIMONY OF CAROL MARIE CLARK,
FORMER PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER

MAY 11, 2011 HEARING ENTITLED:
"PEACE CORPS AT 50. PROBLEMS OF SAFETY AND SECURITY: VICTIMS SPEAK OUT."

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Madam Chairperson, Ranking Member Berman, Committee Members, thank you for inviting me here today to share my story. The women sitting beside me today have made clear that, unfortunately, mine is a story that has been passed down for generations. Thank you for doing all you can to ensure that this story need not be retold.

My name is Carol Marie Clark. I teach sixth grade in a small, rural, public school in one of the poorest counties in North Carolina. For many students in Jones County, the only meals they eat are those we serve at school. Local churches donate food for some of the children to take home on the weekend, and the teachers often buy shoes and uniforms for children whose clothing has worn out. I love teaching in Jones County, because I know that in great need lies great opportunity to make an impact. That belief is the reason I joined the Peace Corps when I was 22 years old. It's also the reason I have come to tell you about what happened to me while I was a Peace Corps Volunteer. The young women America has sent into the world to be its ambassadors of peace, hope, and compassion, who returned home as the victims of rape, neglect, and indifference, need a voice. This is my chance to help breathe life into the Peace Corps' impersonal statistics and to give those women that voice.

The Dream: The Idea of Peace Corps

Ever since I was a little girl, I had wanted to join the Peace Corps. Growing up, John F. Kennedy was my hero. I believed in him, I believed that America was a force for good in the world, and I believed that service to others was the highest calling. So, to me, the Peace Corps was a confluence of everything that was right.

I attended Wake Forest University, in part, because I loved its motto: "pro humanitate," which means, "for humanity." While in college, I volunteered with community clean-up efforts, and I tutored middle school and high school students in math and reading. As soon as I could, I applied to the Peace Corps and was accepted. I graduated in May 1984 and three months later I found myself in Nepal, ready to begin my long-awaited adventure.

The Reality: No Training

Nepal was hot and hazy. New smells and sounds were pervasive. But, what made the most powerful impression on me were the hard lives of the Nepalese people. Most of the people I met lived in mud houses with thatched roofs. Very few families

could afford to send their children to school, so children spent their days working in fields or in homes. Everything was done by hand: men women and children would plow by hand. They would harvest by hand. They would even break gravel for new roads by hand. Malnutrition and child mortality rates soared, and from where I lived, I could hear children crying for food at night. I suppose those are the kinds of things for which one can never be completely prepared. On other issues, however, preparation was possible and necessary, but neglected.

The Peace Corps never provided us with any training about minimizing the risks of sexual harassment, sexual assault, or rape—not before we were sent overseas, and not when we arrived in our Nepali training site. Similarly, we learned nothing about what we should do if such an attack were to occur. We were told Nepali men were very respectful and so any training on that topic would be unnecessary. This advice was belied by the reality we faced in-country.

In Nepal, the female volunteers were disrespected, fondled, and objectified. In cities, men would constantly cup our buttocks or brush against our breasts. One night, another woman and I were sent to visit a separate Volunteer site. Shortly after we had gotten onto the bus, we were surrounded by a group of men. They began touching us and pulling on our clothes. Frightened, we yelled for help, hoping some of the women on the bus would intervene, but they didn't move. We then yelled to the bus driver who eventually pulled over and let us off. We walked the rest of the way.

When we got back to our training site, we asked the Peace Corps staff to teach us what we could do to protect ourselves in those situations. They responded by telling us that there was no chance our harassers were Nepali men, because Nepali men were respectful. Rather, they continued, the men must have been Indians and, in the future, we should avoid getting on buses with Indians. We asked the Peace Corps staff if they would teach us local phrases to tell men to stop touching us or to call for help. They denied our request, saying such phrases were impolite and unnecessary.

The Nightmare: Betrayal

After our training was "complete," I was placed in a village and assigned work as a fisheries extension agent. I would test soil, determine where and how to build ponds, calculate with how many and what types of fish the ponds should be stocked, and advise local farmers as to what kinds of animals should be raised on the banks to keep the ponds fertile. I was excited. I had majored in biology at Wake Forest and had some experience with construction, so the job seemed ideally suited to my skills and interests. It was also a job that designed to help ease the hunger that plagued Nepal.

My enthusiasm, however, quickly turned to anxiety. Soon after I began working, my supervisor, the Nepalese Peace Corps Program Director, began telling the female volunteers that we would have to have sex with him in order to receive our living supplement checks. Volunteers told our Country Director about this, but he did nothing. Rather than disciplining or reporting the Program Director, the Country Director merely

suggested we grow a thicker skin. The Program Director remained insulated in his supervisory position over us, free to harass and intimidate us with virtual immunity. I began bringing a male volunteer with me when I went to pick up my check.

About three months into my service, there was a party in Kathmandu to celebrate the departure of some of the Volunteers. I, like many others, drank too much. In fact, by the end of the night, I couldn't stand. My friends put me in a car with some other Volunteers and the Peace Corps Program Director, who drove me to my hotel. When we arrived at the hotel, one of my Volunteer friends carried me up the stairs into my room and laid me down. Then, the Volunteers left. My Program Director, however, did not leave. He did not ask me what I wanted. He did not ask my permission. He pushed my pants down. He pushed his pants down. He raped me. And, I was physically incapable of stopping him.

The next morning, I went straight to the Peace Corps Medical Officer and reported what my Program Director had done. Instead of helping me, the Medical Officer told me that he was disgusted with all of the Volunteers and that anything that happened to us was our own fault. He gave me no birth control, no prophylaxis, no exam.

Devastated and humiliated, with no one to turn to for help, I returned to my village. I tried to pretend it never happened. I told myself it was just a nightmare. But the brutal reality would soon become inescapable.

The "Choice": Indifference

Weeks later, I realized that I had become pregnant with the child of my rapist. I was terrified and disgusted. I returned to Kathmandu, where I saw a nurse who confirmed my fears. She reported the pregnancy to the Peace Corps Medical Officer, who reported it to the Country Director and to Peace Corps' headquarters in Washington, DC. The Peace Corps' response was that I would need to choose immediately whether to terminate my pregnancy or terminate my service with the Peace Corps.

I was 22 years old. I was far from home, with no one to talk to and no one I could trust. Ashamed and afraid, I called my parents and told them what had happened. To my deeply religious parents, I was a disgrace. The circumstances of my pregnancy were irrelevant. They told me that, so long as I was unmarried and pregnant, I was not welcome back in their home.

So, if I chose to have the baby, neither the Peace Corps nor my parents would have me. Everyday I became more afraid of what I would do on my own, with the child of my rapist growing inside me. I had flashbacks of being raped while I lay helpless to stop it. I couldn't endure it. I wanted to die. Feeling I had no other choice, I made a choice that went against everything that I was taught to believe: I chose to terminate my pregnancy.

The Peace Corps told me to fly to Honolulu for the termination but provided no funding for the procedure. Instead, the family of my best friend sent me the money I needed. The choice I made couldn't erase what happened, but, it was the only choice I felt I had. When it was over, I tried to forget, to heal, and to start again.

The Breaking Point: Danger

I was taught to never give up, and so I returned to Nepal, determined to hold my head up and to honor the commitment I had made to the Nepalese people and to the Peace Corps. But the Peace Corps did not honor the commitments I believe it had made to me.

Not only did the Peace Corps allow the Program Director to remain in his position supervising Volunteers even after I reported the rape, but before the Peace Corps would honor my request to be supervised by someone other than the Program Director who had raped me, I was forced to confront him, face-to-face, in front of the Peace Corps Medical Director. Forcing me to see this man again, to speak to him, and to convince the Peace Corps that he had violated me, was extremely traumatic. But, determined to continue my service, I did it.

I was placed under a new supervisor, who made it clear he was unhappy that I had been assigned to him. The Peace Corps never took action against my assailant. In fact, a month after I returned to service, my former Program Director showed up unannounced at my village. Vulnerable and frightened, I left my post and stayed with a friend until he left.

When I returned to my village, it was clear the Program Director had told others that my body was free for the taking. Anyone who wanted could have me with no questions or consequences. Soon after he left, a Nepalese government official and friend of the Program Director approached me. He offered me "fun, like [I] had with my Peace Corps friend" and tried to forcibly abduct me. I broke free and ran into a local tea house.

Two weeks later, a Nepalese official who worked as my local counterpart in the fisheries program pulled me into his room in the complex where we both lived and worked. He asked me for sex, saying my "Peace Corps friend" had told him how I "liked to have fun." I refused him and tried to get away, but he picked up a hunting knife that was lying on his table and barred the door. Next, he knocked my glasses off. I was virtually blind. He grabbed my neck. He choked me while he pounded my head against the wall, over and over. I thought he would kill me if I kept fighting, so I tried to stop.

Then, he handed me a used, torn condom and demanded that I put it on him. I thought about where it had been and what he would be putting inside of me. I thought about the diseases that might ravage me after this man had finished. I thought about what it had felt like to carry the child of my rapist. I considered fighting until my death.

But, finally, after many violent demands and futile refusals, sick and shaking, I put the used condom on him and tried to will myself to do whatever it took to survive.

But when he began raping me, I couldn't stand it. I couldn't be still. I couldn't be silent. I couldn't let it happen. I fought again. He told me I should stop fighting and learn to enjoy his acts, because these would be the last hours of my life. I would never leave the village alive.

That night, he raped me over and over again. When alcohol deprived him of his power to rape me, he would become angry and beat me instead. He kept me there for 15 hours. For a long time, I prayed to live. And, after that, I prayed to die.

The Escape: More Indifference

As the night went on, every time the sickening, smothering body moved from on top of me, I tried to inch toward where I thought the door must be. Finally, I felt my glasses on the floor near me and put them on. At last I could look around and plan an escape. The next time he came to force himself inside of me I elbowed him as hard as I could, knocking the wind out of him, and I ran. As fast as I could, I sprinted into my room and locked the door.

He and his servant then set up camp outside my room, and waited. I put everything I had against the door and stayed inside until I heard him leave and call his servant away. When I was sure they had left, I took my bicycle and rode, ran, and waded my way to Janakpur. There, I found another Peace Corps Volunteer who agreed to fly with me to Kathmandu.

Once I arrived in Kathmandu, I reported the rape to the Peace Corps Medical Officer. Rather than supporting me, the Medical Officer said that he was angry with me for putting myself in a dangerous situation. He did nothing to document the crime or to bring justice to my attacker. He did, however, report the rape to Peace Corps headquarters and sent me to an American medical doctor. The American doctor was kind. He talked to me and treated me.

Eventually, the Peace Corps flew me back to Washington, DC for counseling. In spite of my aversion to quitting, I was ready to go home. I needed to go home. And the Peace Corps agreed. My supervisors told me to tell others I was going home for dysentery. Lying about the reason for my departure was ostensibly to protect my privacy.

The Program Director who had initially raped me was assigned to collect my belongings and mail them to me. Mislabeled, I did not receive my belongings for two and a half years. Meanwhile, my rapist had my home address.

The Others

After I left, I learned another woman in my Nepal Volunteer group was raped at the point of a machine gun. A different woman in my Volunteer group confessed to me that our supervisor at the fishery tried to rape her, too.

By 1985, so many Nepal Volunteers had been sexually harassed or assaulted that four Volunteers created a safety survey. The survey sought to warn Nepal Volunteers about what was happening and, since no other training had been provided, to give them advice as to how they could protect themselves. In response to the survey, numerous Volunteers reported they had been sexually harassed verbally, nine reported they had been sexually harassed physically, and three reported they had been raped. (*See* attached survey entitled, "Reported Incidents of Sexual Harassment.")

The Volunteers sent the survey to Peace Corps headquarters. I don't know whether the Peace Corps ever responded.

The Un-Welcome Home

When I returned to the United States, the Peace Corps made accommodations for me at a hotel in Washington, DC, with other Returned Volunteers who had been raped. I was told to report to a counselor the next day for an evaluation. Rather than the kind and supportive friend I needed, the counselor was a cruel and judgmental adversary.

Back in the United States for less than a day and entirely unfamiliar with this big city, I got lost and was late to my first counseling appointment. My counselor determined that my tardiness was indisputable evidence of my irresponsibility. Then, when our sessions began, she cited my late-night panicked call to the friend's family who had helped me after the first rape, as evidence that I had some sort of drug problem. She also repeatedly asked me what I had learned from my rapes. When my responses were (apparently) insufficient, the counselor used my failure to benefit from the rapes as evidence of a personality disorder.

Eventually, those counseling sessions ended. The Peace Corps sent me a Workers Compensation Representative to help me start a case file with the Department of Labor so that I could receive medical benefits. I often had to wait several months for my medical bills to be paid, but eventually Workers Compensation paid for 80 percent of my costs. It wasn't everything, but it was something, and I was thankful.

A couple of years later, the Peace Corps offered to place me in another country. I said no. I hadn't healed yet. I'm not sure I ever will.

The Silver Lining

Not everyone at the Peace Corps was indifferent. Jon Keeton, the Peace Corps' Regional Director at the time of my service, ultimately flew to Kathmandu and demanded the resignation of the Program Director who had raped me. The Regional Director and Peace Corps' Legal Office also told me that they had researched possible avenues of recourse before determining that the men who raped me could not be prosecuted.

I spoke to Jon Keeton again two years after I returned. Keeton was kind and concerned. He said he was haunted by what had happened to me. He told me that the Peace Corps had heard my story and that it had made a difference. The Peace Corps was creating new training materials and that future volunteers would be more prepared, and safer. I believe the Peace Corps wanted to change then, as it does now. I also, believe, however, that institutional memory and will power are lost as employees turn over and priorities shift.

I do believe the Peace Corps has come a long way, but there is much further to go, as the experiences of the women sitting with me on this panel show. In the last 20 years, according to the Peace Corps' own data, Peace Corps Volunteers *reported* more than 1600 incidents of sexual assault, over 1000 of which occurred in the last decade. Unfortunately, the number of victims is actually much higher, as the Peace Corps' own annual volunteer surveys reveal that rape and sexual assaults are quite often unreported. In 2009, for example, the annual survey revealed that 33 volunteers were victims of a rape they did not report, and 196 volunteers were victims of a sexual assault they did not report. In that same year, the Peace Corps statistics in the Annual Report of Volunteer Safety recorded only 15 reported rapes or attempted rapes and 100 incidents of sexual assault. The 2010 annual volunteer survey revealed that nearly 40% of rape victims, 44% of victims of attempted rape, and nearly 50% of sexual assault victims did not report their attacks.

And the problem of sexual assault against Peace Corps Volunteers hasn't diminished since my service. Sadly, the three most recent years for which the Peace Corps has released statistics have seen the greatest number of assaults. The women trusting their lives to the Peace Corps every year cannot wait two more decades for the Peace Corps' sexual assault policies to organically mature. The Peace Corps needs help, guidance, and greater accountability. I hope that now that women are speaking about these issues, now that America is learning about these issues, now that Congress is addressing these issues, we can achieve meaningful change.

My Wish

I still believe in the Peace Corps. I believe in its mission. I believe in its premise: that with hard work and compassion, we can build a better world. I want the Peace Corps to continue to represent America as an ambassador of hope and service to the rest of the world. But, I want the young women who go into the Peace Corps today to

be protected. I want them to know the dangers they'll face and know how they can protect themselves. If anything happens to them, I want those women to be treated with compassion and respect. They should be heard, supported, and healed, not blamed, reprimanded, or ignored.

With hard work and compassion, we can build a better, stronger, safer Peace Corps. In great need lies great opportunity. As the women by my side and the affidavits covering your desks can attest, the need is great. The opportunity is now. Let's build a better, safer Peace Corps so that our daughters can help the Peace Corps build a better world.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much.
Ms. Smochek?

STATEMENT OF MS. JESSICA SMOCHEK, FORMER PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER

Ms. SMOCHEK. Chairman Ros-Lehtinen?
Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Hold it closer to you. Thank you.
Ms. SMOCHEK. Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Berman, committee members, my name is Jessica Smochek. I am a former Peace Corps volunteer and a Peace Corps rape survivor.

Thank you, Congressman Poe, Congresswoman Tsongas, and all of you who have been working hard to make the Peace Corps better, stronger, and safer for volunteers.

In 2004, I was 23 years old. Fresh out of college, I joined the Peace Corps, an organization I admired for its noble ideals, and set off for Bangladesh. The Peace Corps said we might experience harassment during our posting but that it just took some getting used to. This statement did not prepare us for the realities we would soon face.

Shortly after I arrived, for example, a group of six local men began following me home. Eventually they surrounded me, grabbed me, knocked me to the ground, and began touching and kissing me. I was terrified and helpless. Eventually they simply left.

When I reported this, the Peace Corps staff told me those types of things just happened. Over time, the harassment only increased. My site mates and I reported this to the Peace Corps staff as well, but most of our reports went unanswered.

A male volunteer offered to teach us self-defense, but the Peace Corps rejected this offer. We asked for pepper spray or mace, but the requests were denied. We begged to be moved to a safer site. Again the Peace Corps refused.

Soon the very act of reporting incidents to the Peace Corps was very dangerous. Locals who learned of the reports became furious. They told me and my site mates it would hurt me if I didn't keep quiet. We reported these threats, too, although with each report, the men grew angrier. And the Peace Corps did nothing.

Then on December 6, 2004, shortly after 5 o'clock p.m., the men dragged me into an abandoned courtyard. And the violence began. They started by raping me. And they forced other objects inside of my body. And when they were done violating me with their bodies and their objects, they intensified their physical assault. They

yelled insults and threatened to kill me. I began to think it would never end. And so I begged them for the death they promised. They just laughed. And after what seemed like a lifetime, my ordeal was over or so I thought.

I went to the capital to report the rape, but the Peace Corps medical officer did not examine me, perform a rape kit, or collect any evidence. Instead, she took away my cell phone. This, unfortunately, prevented me from warning other volunteers and my site mates about what had happened. In fact, she told me that if I did talk to other volunteers, that I should tell them that I was going to Washington to have my wisdom teeth taken out.

Before leaving Bangladesh, I was forced to go back alone to my village, where my rapists remained, to gather my belongings and spend the night there one last time. Then, still reeling from the trauma, I was put on a plane alone back to Washington, DC.

The Peace Corps didn't send me home or give me the option. And so I stayed in Washington, DC, for the next 45 days. When I arrived in DC late at night, no one was there to meet me at the airport. I was forced to find my way through this large, unfamiliar city on my own.

The Peace Corps first sent me to a male gynecologist. He was insensitive, and it was excruciating. The Peace Corps also required me to meet with a counselor, who made me write down everything I had done wrong for this to occur. As examples, she suggested that I had been out after 5 o'clock p.m., I hadn't screamed, and that I didn't fight back. Rather than feeling safe and supported, I felt belittled and blamed.

After 1½ months in DC, I was medically separated from the Peace Corps and shunted onto Worker's Compensation. There I have been repeatedly forced to describe my injury on forms and to strangers to get the support I need to recover. It can take months or years to receive reimbursement. This must be changed so that survivors do not have to go from agency to agency fighting for help they need to recover.

I wish what had happened to me had made a difference for the other volunteers in Bangladesh, but shortly after I left, the country director without my permission told the female volunteers I was raped, that it was my fault, and rape was always a woman's fault.

Years later, I learned at least three other women in my volunteer group were sexually assaulted and probably because of what the country director had said that day did not report it. The Peace Corps must change. Women must be better protected from rape and from the callous treatment that too often follows them.

Maya Angelou said, "History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived but if faced with courage need not be lived again" I am hopeful that today's hearing will precipitate the much needed change in Peace Corps' sexual assault policies and that my nightmare need not be lived again.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today and for bringing these very important issues to light.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Smochek follows:]

TESTIMONY OF JESSICA SMOCHEK, STUDENT AND FORMER PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER

MAY 11, 2011 HEARING ENTITLED:
"PEACE CORPS AT 50. PROBLEMS OF SAFETY AND SECURITY: VICTIMS SPEAK OUT."

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Madam Chairperson, Ranking Member Berman, Congressman Poe, Committee Members, my name is Jessica Smochek. I am a former Peace Corps volunteer and a rape survivor. Thank you for the opportunity to share my story with you and for the hope that you've given to me and to so many others, by giving survivors a voice and by demonstrating a genuine interest in making the Peace Corps safer for future Volunteers.

I. Entering the Peace Corps: The Failure to Prepare

I joined the Peace Corps in 2004, when I was 23 years old. Growing up, my grandparents always emphasized the importance of compassion and giving. When I was eleven, I visited my aunt, who was a social worker in Jamaica. I saw how children lived when they were given fewer advantages than those enjoyed by most children in the United States. After that, I never forgot how lucky I was to be an American. When I was in high school, I volunteered as a candy striper. And once, after my hometown experienced massive flooding, I helped to organize a free drop-in day care center to help parents who needed time to rebuild their homes and lives.

My college placed a strong value on volunteerism and international development. While I was there, I volunteered for Habitat for Humanity and taught English as a second language to kindergarten students. Through grants and scholarship programs, I was given the opportunity to study abroad. I studied in Japan, Germany, Poland, and Thailand.

Two of my favorite college professors were former Peace Corps volunteers and, knowing that I loved to travel and wanted to dedicate my life to helping others, thought the Peace Corps and I were a great match. I did, too. Having studied abroad in Japan and Thailand and travelled throughout the continent, I decided I wanted to serve in Asia. I was assigned to Bangladesh, somewhere I had never been and didn't know a lot about. Peace Corps didn't prepare me for what I experienced.

Before we were sent to Bangladesh, the new volunteers met for a day and a half in Seattle. We got information packets and played ice beakers. We were told a little bit about Bangladeshi culture. The women, for example, were told we would need to wear local clothing. But there was no substantive discussion of country conditions, sexual harassment, or safety. Instead we were told we'd get our training in-country. Unfortunately, meaningful training never came.

Our landing in Bangladesh was a hard one. Everywhere around us in Bangladesh, we could see signs of extreme poverty. Most families had no running water. Many children were too poor to afford the uniforms required to attend school and so spent their days in the street. The lack of a sanitation system meant that piles of trash lined the roads and the fields.

We were sent to Savar for ten weeks of training. It was August of 2004. Political riots swirled around us after an assassination attempt was made against the female prime minister. Because it was considered too dangerous, the Peace Corps staff was forbidden to take public transportation. Peace Corps Volunteers, however, were still required to use it. This public transportation policy was, in part, what caused the Peace Corps' to lose a volunteer for three days shortly after our arrival, while the volunteer was attempting a site visit. For these reasons, and others, we were issued cell phones and were required to keep them with us at all times—something we were told the Peace Corps didn't do for volunteers in any other country. Looking back I realize that the cell phone policy demonstrated the Peace Corps' awareness that our situation was precarious.

Nevertheless, our in-country safety training was anemic. At no time during our ten-week training were we taught how to protect ourselves. We were told we might experience harassment, but that it was cultural, it could be laughed off, and we'd get used to it. The only mention of rape was in a video that showed three rape victims who spoke apologetically about having consumed alcohol prior to their rapes. Since Bangladesh was a dry country, the video didn't seem to apply to us at all. We were led to believe that we wouldn't be in any true danger if we just wore local clothing and stayed in at night. Armed with this simplistic belief, we were sent to our villages. Two other women and I were placed in a village called Kishoreganj. It would soon earn a reputation as the most dangerous volunteer site in the country.

II. Placed in Jeopardy: The Failure to Protect

Not long after our arrival, female volunteers throughout Bangladesh, would be routinely confronted by the most aggressive sexual harassment we had ever experienced. Walking down the street, in markets, and on busses, we were constantly approached. Strangers would put their arms around us and say things like "you want to sex me now." Men would follow us everywhere we went and, if we tried to walk away, would grab our arms---or any other part of us they liked---and tell us they were not done speaking to us and had not given us permission to leave. In none of our other travels had any of us ever been so constantly barraged by unwanted verbal and physical harassment. That we wore local clothing and stayed home after dark made no difference.

After multiple female volunteers reported numerous incidents of harassment, a male volunteer offered to train the female volunteers in self defense. The Peace Corps, however, refused his offer. Instead, Peace Corps suggested that any women

experiencing stalking, threats, unwanted touching, or aggressive behavior call the peer helpline to learn how other female volunteers had learned to "deal with it."

III. Danger Escalates: The Failure to Respond

I tried to adjust and to ignore the danger, as the Peace Corps seemed to suggest we should. I began teaching English at a girl's school. But in early November 2004, soon after I was placed in my village, I was confronted by the group of men who would begin a campaign of harassment and threats that, despite my begging for protection from the Peace Corps, ultimately ended in gang rape and torture.

I was returning to my village after a medical check up in the capital city. I had taken a rickshaw for the last leg of the trip. The driver had let me out and was attempting to overcharge me for the ride. A group of six Bangladeshi men in their early twenties or late teens saw the argument and seemed to come to my aid. I paid the driver, thanked them for their help, and began to walk the rest of the way home. But, the men followed me. At first, they tried making conversation and asking me questions. But gradually they surrounded me. Instead of questioning me, they began touching me. They tried to kiss me. Soon they grabbed me and, when I tried to get away, they knocked me to the ground, touching me and kissing me more. I was terrified and helpless. Eventually, they simply left.

When I got up, I realized my host uncle had watched the whole thing and had done nothing. That night, my host father told me that it was no big deal; the boys were simply curious about Americans, and I should brush it off. I then reported the incident to the Peace Corps Medical Officer (PCMO) and to the Peace Corps country safety officer. But they told me that those types of things just happened in Bangladesh and recommended I call the peer helpline. The Country Director merely emailed me, saying he had heard what happened and hoped it got better.

As time went on, harassment and threats continued, for me and for the other women stationed in my village. We were stalked and groped. A man tried to break into one of my site-mate's homes when her host family was away. We reported these incidents to the in-country staff, who were responsible for alerting Peace Corps Headquarters in Washington, D.C., but for a long time, our reports went unanswered. We asked for pepper spray or mace, but these requests were denied. We begged to move to a safer site, but again Peace Corps refused.

The Peace Corps safety officer eventually visited my site and talked to the local police. She told me a policeman would be stationed on the main road between my house and the school where I worked. This provided some temporary relief, but eventually the police protection waned, and finally disappeared.

With no long-term protections in place, our reports to the Peace Corps were dangerous. The local men learned that I had reported them, and this made them furious. They began telling me and my site mates that they were going to hurt me if I

didn't keep quiet. At first, we reported these threats to the Peace Corps, but with every report, the men became angrier. With virtually no security measures in place to protect me, I was at their mercy. And so, eventually, we stopped reporting the threats.

We were harassed every single day. We were scared to go anywhere. The three of us stationed in my village tried to stay together as much as we could. Eventually we decided we would try to find an apartment to share so that we would never have to be without each other. We were too late.

IV. December 6th: Worst Fears Realized

There was no school on December 6, 2004, so Kelly, one of my site mates came to my house early that morning to go apartment hunting. Just as we were about to leave, the Peace Corps security officer texted me that she was coming to our site to meet with us and talk to the police. She didn't say which, if any, of our many reports inspired her decision.

When she arrived, she asked us for an update on the threats and harassment. Kelly told her what had been going on, and the security officer said she would talk to the police later that day. We never found out whether or about what she spoke to the police. In fact, I never spoke to her again despite what happened to me later that day.

When the security officer left, Kelly and I went looking for apartments. When we had finished it was late afternoon. I walked Kelly to a safe place where she could find a rickshaw and then began walking home. I was walking down the main road, the one the policeman was supposed to patrol but never did. It was around 5:00 PM, near dusk, and the road was silent and empty.

All of a sudden, I was lifted off the ground and felt a knife against my face and a hand over my mouth. I was dragged onto a side street into an abandoned concrete courtyard, and my nightmare began. Some of the men who had warned for months that they were going to hurt me, from who I had begged to be protected, were about to put me through a night of unimaginable horror, subjecting me to acts that I should not have been able to survive, that I did not want to survive, that I nearly didn't survive.

First, they slammed me against a wall. One man kept me pinned there while another kept his hand on my mouth and a third flashed a knife in front of me. They were screaming at me, accusing me of going to the police. They had warned me not to talk, they yelled. They asked me who I thought I was and told me I needed to learn a woman's place. One said that I thought I could get away with anything because I was American, but they wouldn't let me get away with what I had done. They would show me what it was like to be a woman in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, they said, women don't tell. Because I had told, I had left them no choice: they had to kill me.

That's when I knew I was going to die. Hours later, I wished I had been right about that.

They ripped my clothes, and they pulled down my pants. I was raped. Strange objects were forced inside of my body. I couldn't breathe. There were hands over my mouth and face. They kept flashing the knife at me and threatening to kill me. I tried to keep my eyes closed. I tried to breathe. I tried to survive.

It didn't end, even after they finished raping me. Instead, they continued their physical assault, and I began to think it would never end. With no hope of rescue, I begged them to kill me. But they just laughed.

When the men finally finished with me and left, I couldn't move. For a while, I thought I would just stay there and die. I wanted to die.

V. Aftermath of the Attack: The Wrong Response

Eventually, I found the courage to begin the walk back to my house. My host family wasn't home. I went to the bathroom and tried to wash myself. After I had used up everything in my medical kit, I went back to my room, locked the door, and turned out the light. When my host family came home, they banged on my door, but I couldn't answer. I texted one of my site mates that we had to go to the capital in the morning, and then I tried to sleep. Despite my exhaustion, I laid awake all night, afraid my attackers would break through my wooden shutters.

The next morning, without talking to my host family, I left the house and met one of my site mates at the bus stand. I couldn't tell her anything, but she could see that something was wrong. Predictably, our bus was delayed. So, by the time we got to the capital, the hotel where Volunteers normally stayed was full. It was getting dark, and we had nowhere to go. I was terrified, but the owner of the hotel ended up inviting us to stay at his house. I was scared, but thankful for the room.

The next day I went to the Peace Corps' office and saw the PCMO, Jen. Still in shock, I was unable to tell the PCMO what had happened. She sent me to a counselor, but I still couldn't bring myself to tell anyone what the men had done. I could only say that I didn't feel safe at my site. Later, in another attempt to get me to reveal what had happened, the PCMO gave me valium, and told me to write down what I refused to say. I didn't want to write about it. I didn't want to remember it. It was too painful to admit, even to myself. Moreover, I was exhausted and, with the valium, writing got harder and harder. But the PCMO insisted. Because she wouldn't let me stop writing until she was satisfied she had a complete story, I wrote down an abbreviated version of the details I could stand to reveal.

After I finished writing, the PCMO gave me prophylactic medicines to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy. She also allowed me to call my parents and a professor to whom I was very close. In addition, she contacted the Country Director, who was away on a site visit, but he chose not to come back or to contact me.

The PCMO did not, however, physically examine me or provide me with a rape kit. In fact, no one collected any evidence of what had happened. The PCMO soon after took away my cell phone—the one they had issued us and told us to keep on our person at all times. Jen said my cell phone was unnecessary and a distraction. This, unfortunately, prevented me from warning any of the other volunteers about what had happened. Jen told me that if I did happen to talk to any other volunteers, I should tell them I was leaving to have my wisdom teeth pulled out.

I stayed in the city for a few nights and then was sent back to my village alone to gather my belongings. A driver dropped me off at my host family's house and I was forced to spend the night there one last time. One of my site mates came over to help me pack and to stay with me. On her way over, she was attacked and pushed to the ground. I heard her screaming and ran outside to help. It was too dark to see the attacker, who then ran away.

VI. Return to the United States: The Wrong Reception

Only after the Peace Corps had promised to pull my site mates from the village, did I agree to leave Bangladesh. I insisted that the Peace Corps change my original flight plan, because it had called for a long layover somewhere in the Qatar, which the Peace Corps suggested might offer me an opportunity to do some sight seeing, which was the last thing I could do in my state. On December 13th, while I was still reeling from the trauma, I was put on a plane, all alone, back to Washington, DC. I was not offered anyone to fly with, nor was I offered the opportunity to fly to Pennsylvania to see my family. I was told I had to come straight to Washington, DC, where I would stay for 45 days.

When I arrived at the airport in DC, there was no one to meet me. I had to find my way through this large, unfamiliar city by myself. I had been given directions to the Peace Corps office, but no other information about the area.

On my first night in DC, the rooms in the hotel the Peace Corps sent me to were full, so I slept on a couch in the suite of some other returned Volunteers. The next morning, I got up early and found my way to the Peace Corps' office building and began the rigorous rounds of mandatory appointments that would continue for the next month and a half.

One of the first appointments to which Peace Corps sent me was with a male gynecologist. He was insensitive, and it was an awful experience. I was also sent to a doctor who examined me for parasites and disease and eventually diagnosed me with Bangladeshi ringworm. The doctor provided me with prophylactics that made me sick and with malaria medicine to which I turned out to be allergic. Because I learned of the allergy after leaving Washington, DC, I had to personally find and pay for a specialist who could help me get the medicine I needed.

Another mandatory appointment was with two men from the Inspector General's (IG's) Office. I didn't want to go alone to tell two strange men about what had happened to me. While in-country I was told that I would be given an option as to whether to have the meeting. But, when I arrived in DC, I was told that the meeting was mandatory.

Peace Corps also required that I meet with a counselor, Robin. Far from helping me heal, meeting with Robin re-traumatized me. She gave me a piece of Santa Claus paper that said "ho, ho, ho," and made me write down everything I had done wrong and would do differently when I went back to Bangladesh. As examples to "help" me get started, she suggested I write down: that I had gone out alone after 5:00 PM, that I didn't scream or fight back, and that I had failed to integrate into the community. Rather than feeling safe and supported, I felt belittled and blamed.

Once a week, I was also sent to a psychiatrist, Deborah, who worked an hour outside of the city in a remote area. I didn't feel safe travelling to her office, and I didn't like or trust Deborah, but I wasn't given any choice about my treatment provider. Deborah pressured and provoked me into talking about my experience. Once I did tell her what had happened, she diagnosed me with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, which she attributed to the rape. She recommended that I receive treatment and be evaluated for my potential to return to Bangladesh at a later date.

No one from the Peace Corps ever asked me what they could have done to help prevent what happened, what needed to be improved, or how they could protect the others who remained near my site.

VII. Separation from the Peace Corps: A Rough Transition

After my 45 days in DC, I was medically separated from the Peace Corps. Without any explanation of the system, I was shunted onto the Department of Labor's workers compensation program, where I have been left to plead for the benefits I've needed to recover. I am required to repeatedly describe my "injury" on forms and to strangers. Stunned by the question, I often don't know what to say. The process is not designed to be navigated by victims of sexual trauma.

With case examiners constantly changing and forms disappearing between Affiliated Computer Services and the Office of Workers Compensation Programs, many of my claims have taken months—some, years—to process. I am still awaiting reimbursements for claims I submitted in October of 2009.

VIII. Impact in the Field: Continued Danger

I wish I could say that what happened to me made a difference for the other women in Bangladesh, that the Peace Corps realized the danger and protected them better after I left. I even wrote a letter to the Peace Corps explaining the danger and telling them my site was no place for volunteers. But my letter went unheeded, and the

women in my site were no safer than before. Just as I had not been made safer after the warnings sent to the Peace Corps by the women placed in Kishoreganj before me.

The harassment and threats continued. In fact, in June of 2005, some of the Bangladesh volunteers did a safety survey showing the dangers the volunteers were facing and sent the survey to Peace Corps headquarters in Washington. The Country Director threatened them with administrative separation, the Peace Corps' version of a dishonorable discharge.

Shortly after I left, the Country Director (who never attempted to contact me after I was raped), called a meeting of several women in my former volunteer group and told them, without my permission, what had happened to me. Then, he told them that rape was a woman's fault and that I had caused what happened to me by being out alone after 5:00 PM. As for the other women in the group who had been very vocal about being constantly stalked and afraid, he threatened them with administrative separation.

Years later, I learned that several other women in my volunteer group were sexually assaulted after me and, partly because the Country Director had made such an example of me, chose not to report it. One terminated her service early. Two simply kept quiet, didn't seek help, and finished their terms.

IX. Hope for the Future: Policy Recommendations

Much could be done to ensure future volunteers don't have to live through what too many of us have already experienced.

First, every Peace Corps employee should be trained in sexual assault prevention and response. To ensure the training is meaningful, the training must be designed and vetted by experts as well as victims, before being implemented. Current materials that are woefully outdated or worse – materials that cause affirmative harm – should be discontinued now.

Second, those who are sexually assaulted or raped while serving in the Peace Corps need in-person advocates to provide support at every step of the process. While in-country, every survivor must have an in-person advocate to assist her in:

- Securing safe accommodations after an attack;
- Obtaining immediate medical attention, including a rape kit, appropriate prophylaxis, and a morning-after pill to be used at the survivor's discretion;
- Reporting the incident to the Peace Corps' Headquarters;
- Understanding her options for pursuing legal action, such as how the prosecutorial process works in the country of service, how victims are involved in those prosecutions, how long she has to press charges under the country's statutes of

limitations, what protection will be provided to her should she remain in country to prosecute, and what emotional and financial assistance the Peace Corps will provide during the ordeal; and

- Gaining access to intermediate medical and counseling resources in the country or region of service, should she choose to remain or return.

Peace Corps should allow returned victims to go home to their families to heal, instead of forcing them to live for long periods in a city that is unfamiliar and far from home. It should provide victims with a list of resources available in their home states, such as rape crisis and suicide prevention centers, and trauma-specific therapists and psychiatrists who take worker's compensation insurance. But, should victims choose to come to Washington, DC upon their return to the United States, they must be treated with care. They must be met at the airport, provided with a list of practical and available medical and counseling resources, and supported as they get the help they need.

Finally, once separated from the Peace Corps, victims need a liaison to the Department of Labor to help them navigate the bureaucratic impediments to the benefits and resources that are theoretically available but practically sparse. They also need someone to hold the Department of Labor accountable for timely and thoroughly honoring victims' claims, and thus, an advocate should regularly monitor claims and advocate for their prompt payment on the victims' behalf. This type of permanent liaison position is critical to eliminating the unnecessary delay and harm represented by the current system. Peace Corps was given an opportunity to make these reforms voluntarily in the 1990s. That effort clearly did not produce effective reform. Now Congress must act.

Even working tirelessly, a single victims' advocate would be unable to provide the in-depth and comprehensive support needed for the legion of rape and sexual assault survivors, whose ranks grow by twenty-to-forty new volunteers each year. Therefore, the Peace Corps must, at a minimum, have a properly-tasked victim support *network* in Washington, D.C., as well as a Sexual Assault Response Coordinator in all Regional Hubs.

First Response Action's Survivors' Bill of Rights creates a victim-centered framework for approaching the prevention and response of sexual assault. What it asks is practical and necessary. And, I believe implementing the Survivors' Bill of Rights is an important step toward improving Peace Corps Volunteers' safety and security, and toward ensuring that victims of sexual assault are given the help and dignity they deserve.

I believe in the Peace Corps. I believe that the Peace Corps wants to do the right thing, and is trying. But I am thankful that Congress is interested in ensuring that, through accountability, changes are implemented that are meaningful and long lasting. I am also thankful that Congress has given my thoughts and my story a voice. Maya

Angelou once said, "History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again." I am hopeful that, because of your concern, the Peace Corps can continue in all its promise, stronger than before, and my nightmare need not be lived again.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much for your testimony.

Dr. Koenen?

STATEMENT OF KARESTAN CHASE KOENEN, PH.D., FORMER PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER

Dr. KOENEN. Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Berman, committee members, my name is Dr. Karestan Koenen. I am an Associate Professor at Columbia University and an Adjunct Professor——

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Could you put the microphone just a little bit closer to your mouth so we can hear you better?

Dr. KOENEN. Sorry. Yes. I am an Associate Professor at Columbia University and an Adjunct Professor at Harvard University. I teach about psychological trauma. My understanding of and my passion for the topic are the result both of my education and, unfortunately, my own experience with the Peace Corps.

I joined the Peace Corps in 1991. It was clear from the beginning that my country, Niger, was dangerous. Also clear was the Peace Corps staff inadequacy in dealing with the effects of danger on volunteers. For example, 1 week during our in-country training period, several men broke into our site, assaulted two male volunteers and raped a female volunteer.

I recall telling my site director that I felt unsafe, but I was told that I was making too much of what had happened. The Peace Corps staff then instructed us not to tell our families about the attacks.

The staff's instructions to calm down and keep quiet were the only training we received on how to respond to an assault. Despite the fact that serious crimes had occurred on the training compound, we did not receive any training on how to minimize the risk of assaults or how to report them should they occur.

On December 27, 1991, I was forced to learn by experience about the dangers of sexual assault. A Nigerian man held me down, ripped off my shorts and underwear, and raped me.

The doctor who worked for the Peace Corps was kind but neither trained nor equipped to perform a forensic rape exam. No one gave me the opportunity to make a formal statement or to speak with law enforcement. And although the doctor reported the rape to the Peace Corps' country director, he did not visit me, he did not call me. I was soon put on an international flight to Washington, DC, alone.

Upon arriving at Peace Corps headquarters, I was greeted with a cold reception. I was first sent to a male gynecologist. I recall finding the pelvic exam incredibly painful and him telling me to stop being hysterical and to just calm down.

I was then sent to speak with a Peace Corps staff investigator, who said, "I am so sick of you girls going over there, drinking, dancing, and flirting. And then if a guy comes on to you, you say you have been raped."

My final straw was when my Peace Corps country director said to me when I wanted to prosecute, "It is your word against his. He said you wanted to have sex, and we believe him."

As an expert in the field of psychological trauma, I know how dangerous an inadequate response to the rape victim can be. Fear of being disbelieved or blamed, as I was by the Peace Corps, is exactly why so many survivors do not report their rapes.

The Peace Corps' own data suggests two times more assaults occur in the Peace Corps than those that are reported. In addition, over a decade of research has demonstrated that the social support a survivor receives in the aftermath of a trauma highly influences the risk that the victim will develop post-traumatic stress disorder. A negative social response leaves a survivor in a quagmire of self-blame for the rest of her life.

I have examined the current sexual assault protocols and policies of the Peace Corps. And though they have evolved since my time of service, they remain dangerously inadequate.

Several other experts have reviewed the Peace Corps' 2011 sexual assault guidelines, as I did, and have written letters to the committee expressing their concerns with the policies and their recommendation for change. I am including these letters for the record as part of my testimony.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Without objection.

[NOTE: The letters offered by Dr. Koenen are not reprinted here but are available in committee records.]

Dr. KOENEN. The affidavits and letters from other experts make it clear that it is time for a systemic, permanent solution that addresses better training for volunteers, training for in-country staff, and appropriate vetting and accountability for staff in the United States.

Of these needed reforms, there are eight things the Peace Corps could do right away to dramatically increase and improve the care provided to its volunteers. They are, one, discontinue the use of Peace Corps' current sexual assault training video called "Serving Safely" that shows survivors apologizing for endangering themselves and causing their rapes.

Two, put victims' advocates in every region. I am pleased that the Peace Corps has hired a victims' advocate in DC, but caring for the in-country and post-service needs of what are at least 100 sexual assault a year is too great a burden for one person to carry.

Three, provide travel companions for rape and sexual assault survivors returning home to the U.S.

Four, eliminate the harmful and minimizing distinction used in the Peace Corps' own materials to distinguish major sexual assault from minor sexual assaults.

Five, set up a task force with the Department of Labor to determine how to help survivors get adequate and timely benefits without being forced to reexperience their traumas.

Six, enlist the help of outside experts with authority to ensure Peace Corps policies continually reflect best practices.

Seven, provide survivors the choice of treatment providers.

And, eight, fire the staff and treatment providers who blame victims and harm them.

I believe Director Williams to be well-intentioned, but we simply cannot ignore history. The Peace Corps has promised time and time and time again to fix these problems, and it has not. We need Congress.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about my experience and my hope for a better, stronger, safer Peace Corps.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Koenen follows:]

TESTIMONY OF DR. KARESTAN CHASE KOENEN
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, MAILMAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH,
ADJUNCT ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, HARVARD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH,
FORMER PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER

MAY 11, 2011 HEARING ENTITLED:
"PEACE CORPS AT 50. PROBLEMS OF SAFETY AND SECURITY: VICTIMS SPEAK OUT."

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Madam Chairperson, Ranking Member Berman, Committee Members, my name is Dr. Karestan Koenen. I am an Associate Professor at Columbia University and an Adjunct Professor at Harvard University. I teach about psychological trauma. My understanding of, and passion for, this topic are the result of both my education and, unfortunately, my own experience as a volunteer in the Peace Corps. Thank you for inviting me here to share my expertise and experiences with you, both of which compel me believe that substantial improvements are needed in the Peace Corps' sexual assault policies.

POSSIBILITY: ASK NOT WHAT YOUR COUNTRY CAN DO FOR YOU

I was raised in Pompton Plains, New Jersey by parents who believed strongly that America was a land of opportunity. My father and mother both grew up in families that struggled with severe financial hardship and worked hard to achieve the American dream for themselves and their children. My mother and her six younger siblings were raised in rural Michigan, where my grandmother worked as a seamstress in a small factory and my grandfather worked as an electrician and deputy sheriff. My maternal grandparents also served as caretakers for a summer camp for young women who had been taken away from their parents because of neglect or abuse. My mother's dream was to see the world outside Michigan, so she eventually left Michigan and took a nursing position at the University of Pennsylvania Hospital, in Philadelphia.

My father grew up in Pompton Plains on a small farm where his family made its living selling eggs. My father's dream was to go to college, a dream he realized after being accepted to the Naval Academy. While still at the Academy, he met my mother, and they married shortly after he graduated. I was born while my father was doing his military service as an officer on nuclear submarines.

My parents believed they were lucky to live in a country that enabled them to overcome the impoverished circumstances of their childhoods and achieve their dreams, and they felt responsible for serving their country, accordingly. This was one reason my parents were so proud of our family's strong history of military service. My grandfather served in combat in World War II, my father served in Vietnam, and three of my cousins have now served in the Middle East. One of my father's favorite sayings was from Luke 12:48: "For everyone to whom much is given, of him much shall be required." He practiced what he preached, not just through his military service, but

through consistent engagement in other public service. Despite a demanding profession and a busy family life, he made time to serve in local government with a particular focus on improving public education. My parents sense of obligation and gratitude toward this country led them to instill in me and my siblings a deep commitment to public service.

It was with this upbringing that I entered Wellesley College in 1986. I was determined to use my skills and intellect in a profession that would help others. This determination was reinforced at Wellesley, where the motto is "non ministrari sed ministrare": not to be ministered unto but to minister. This emphasis on public service is reflected in the careers of many of Wellesley's most famous graduates, including Hillary Rodham Clinton. And, the sentiment in John F. Kennedy's inaugural address in 1961: "Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country," was still alive and well at Wellesley when I was there.

Thus, I pursued a major in economics and a minor in African history, intending to pursue a career as a development economist focused on sub-Saharan Africa. I had always dreamed of becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer in Africa. I applied to the Peace Corps during my senior year at Wellesley and was waiting to be accepted when I graduated. So, after graduation, I took a job as a research assistant in the Developing Economies division of the Federal Reserve Bank in New York. My plan was to quit my job at the Federal Reserve Bank as soon as I was accepted to the Peace Corps—which I did, when I was 22 years old.

NIGER: THE WORLD'S POOREST COUNTRY

The Peace Corps assigned me to Niger, a country I had never heard of before I received my invitation letter. I soon learned that Niger had been ranked by the World Health Organization as the poorest country on earth. One out of every four children in Niger died before their first birthday of easily preventable disease, such as dysentery. One in every sixteen women died in childbirth. In fact, the average life expectancy was just 42 years. Moreover, Niger had almost no basic infrastructure and, except for uranium, no natural resources. I was one of several volunteers who were part of a new program aimed at working with women to improve their economic conditions and thereby improve the health and well-being of their children.

TRAINING: THE FAILURE TO PREPARE AND PROTECT

In June 1991, the Peace Corps sent me to Washington, D.C. for three days of pre-country training. I then went to Niger, where we received eleven weeks of additional training before being placed in our villages. The in-country training occurred in a compound on the outskirts of Niamey, the capital of Niger. One week, most of us left the training site to stay in villages with current volunteers, as preparation for our own village placements. During that time, several men broke into the training site, assaulting two male volunteers and raping a female volunteer who had remained behind. The victims were my bunkmates.

The perpetrators also robbed us. Those of us who had been visiting volunteer villages were informed of the break-in when we returned to Niamey. In my journal, I wrote about the volunteers' reactions to the assaults and robbery. We felt violated. Our sense of safety had been shattered. Several of us reported having nightmares and feeling constantly on guard. At the same time, many of us felt guilty about having any personal reactions, since we had not experienced the horrors of rape and assault that our friends had suffered.

Stepping back, as a mental health professional who specializes in psychological trauma, I can see that what the other volunteers and I experienced—while clearly not has horrifying as the rape and direct assaults—was a traumatic event that should have been addressed by the Peace Corps. Our 'home' was violated, our bunkmates assaulted, and our possessions stolen. The Peace Corps staff showed no recognition of our psychological needs whatsoever. In fact, any vulnerability we felt was dismissed. For example, I recall telling our site director that I didn't feel safe and being told that I was making too much of what happened and that crime was much rarer in Niger than the United States. I also recall the Peace Corps staff instructing us not to tell our families what had happened. This instruction was reflected in a letter I sent home to my family during this time, in which I mentioned being robbed of some valuables, but nothing else.

The staffs' instructions to calm down and keep quiet were the only training we received on how to respond to an assault. Despite the fact that serious crimes had occurred in the training compound, we did not receive any information or training on how to recognize or handle threats, increase our safety, prevent assaults, or report them, should they occur.

VILLAGE: FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY

Following the in-country training I was assigned to a large village on the southern tip of Niger, near the border of Benin. I was fortunate in my assignment for many reasons. My village was large and had resources—such as a health clinic and a market—and the southern tip of Niger receives more rainfall, so water was fairly plentiful. I settled into my mud house in the compound of a local family and adjusted to the absence of electricity and running water: living circumstances typical to volunteers in Niger. Due to the heat, which sometimes reached 120 degrees, many of the volunteers and villagers spent most of our time outside. We even slept outside.

Although I was often harassed by local men, I never questioned my safety in my village. This was, in part, due to the fact that my village chief made it clear to everyone that I was under his protection. For example, I had to pass a security check point to get into a larger town nearby. Every time I passed the check point, the security guard would ask me to get off my motorcycle and make lewd comments about my body. I mentioned this to my chief once, and it never happened again.

RAPE

In December 1991, my sister and mother came to visit me in Niger. After my mother left, my sister stayed with me through Christmas. She planned to leave after New Years Day. We decided to travel for the holidays and received permission to do so from the Peace Corps' head office. We went to Agadez, a city in the Sahara desert. We arrived in Agadez at 6am on December 24th. We stayed at the home of another volunteer (whom I will call A), who left that Thursday, December 26th, to go to Niamey for the New Year.

My attacker, whom I will call P, was an acquaintance of A. We had met him previously while in the market with A. We all had tea with P and his friends, and my sister and I spoke with them about buying jewelry. This was the extent of our acquaintance prior to the day I was raped.

***Friday December 27, 1991, I was sleeping when P (my attacker) knocked on A's concession door at approximately 9am. A had left the day before so my sister and I were staying at A's house alone. My sister was awake so she answered the door. I heard their voices and thought it might be P but I was too tired to get up and had no interest in seeing him. They were outside the door of the house talking for a few minutes but I couldn't hear what was said. My sister came in and told me P was waiting outside. She told me he wanted to see me. I told her to tell him I was sleeping and that we would come by the store later. She went outside and I assume she told him what I said. She came back and told me that he insisted on seeing me now.

I got up reluctantly and wrapped the large thick grey wool blanket I was sleeping with around me. I had been sleeping in long white shorts and a grey sleeveless tee shirt. The blanket was large and covered my legs and shoulders.

I went outside and sat in the chair next to P. He was wearing a long beige coat with a belt. His collar was up. He had his head wrapped in the typical Wodaabe desert headdress. After I sat down outside, my sister went inside the house. For the next few minutes we talked about the Wodaabe beauty pageant, his fiancé, his American friends, my "husband" (I had taken up the habit of telling Nigerian men I was married and wore a wedding band) and my village. He asked where my sister was and I told him she was inside. During our conversation, he grabbed my hand. I pulled it back – feeling uncomfortable and pulled my blanket tighter around me. He touched my shoulder with his right hand and told me how nice I was. He told me he and his friends had waited outside A's house until midnight the night before. My sister and I had gotten a ride back to A's from friends at about 12:30 am. I was feeling increasingly uncomfortable so I told him I had things to do but that I would come by his store later. He insisted that he wanted to stay and talk.

*** The following account is taken verbatim from the official statement I wrote for the Peace Corps when I returned to Washington, D.C., following the rape.

At some point during our conversation, P's friend knocked on the concession door. I answered the door. He came inside and said he wanted to see my sister. I called her and she came out to speak to him. P's friend had given her 2 necklaces the day before which she was considering purchasing. She had decided to buy them for 3500 CFA. We didn't have any change in the house so he suggested that my sister go back to the store with him to get change. As they were leaving, I said to my sister "Come back soon, I don't want to be alone with P for long."

P and I talked about exchanging addresses. I went inside to get a paper and pen and he came in after me. I went to the table to get paper (the table is immediately on your left hand side as you walk in the house). He grabbed my left hand and said in French "Come let's go inside" and began pulling me toward the bedroom. I said no and shook my head pulling away. He grabbed me and kissed me. I pushed him away and started toward the door. He grabbed my arm and dragged me over to the bench in the living room. I struggled, said no and was trying to think of what to do to get rid of him. He pushed me down onto the bench. I was struggling to get him off me by pushing against his chest but he was very forceful and much stronger than me. I tried harder and harder to push him off and started kicking. But he used his knees and right hand to hold me down. I remember thinking, "Oh my God he is going to rape me." I kept saying no and kept trying to push him off. He told me to take off my shorts. I kept struggling and screamed no, but he ripped my shorts and underwear and raped me. The pain was searing. I had been a virgin.

He got up immediately then and went to the bathroom. I sat up and sat there on the bench stunned. He came back. I stood up. He said "I will be back later with my friends." He left. I immediately started packing. I was scared he would come back so I wanted to leave as soon as my sister came back. I didn't have a watch so I didn't know how long she had been gone. We had told our friends to pick us up for lunch at 1pm so I wanted to be ready by then.

When my sister came back, I told her I had been raped. She agreed that we should leave that afternoon on the bus and get to the Peace Corps office as soon as possible. Around 12:45, P and his friends knocked on the concession door. I was shaking and terrified, frozen. My sister was yelling at them to leave when our friend showed up – P and his friends immediately left. We did not tell our friend what had happened, but he knew something was wrong– he took us to his house. I called Dr. P (American in country doctor) and told him what happened. He was very supportive and said he would meet us at the PC clinic the next morning. We stayed at our friend's house until he brought us to the bus at 7pm that evening.

Dr. P sent the following cable, verbatim, to the Peace Corps in Washington, DC:

S: YESTERDAY MORNING, WHILE STAYING AT THE HOME OF ANOTHER PCV, [NAME], WHO WAS HIMSELF IN NIAMEY AT AN IST MEETING, TWO LOCAL WADAABE MEN CAME INTO THE HOUSE OSTENSIBLY SELLING JEWELRY. THEY WERE KNOWN TO THE PCV

WHO LIVED THERE. ONE OF THE TWO MEN TOOK THE VISITING PCV'S SISTER BACK TO A JEWELRY SHOP WHERE HE SHOWED HER SOME JEWELRY AND SOLD IT TO HER. WHILE HE DID THAT, THE OTHER ONE RAPED THE VISITING PCV. THIS WAS DONE IN THE MORNING. THE PCV WAS PROPERLY DRESSED IN THE HOUSE. THERE WAS NO "REQUEST" ON HER PART. (SHE WAS A VIRGIN AS WELL). . . .

HE THEN LEFT. THE PCV AND HER SISTER ARRANGED TO COME TO NIAMEY AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AND CALLED ME AT HOME THIS MORNING, SATURDAY 12/28/91 AS SOON AS THEY GOT TO TOWN ON THE BUS. I MET THEM AT THE PEACE CORPS OFFICE WITHIN A FEW MINUTES. [MEDICAL NOTES FOLLOW]

IN COUNTRY RESPONSE: INADEQUATE

I was fortunate in that I knew my in-country doctor would be supportive because I had seen his response to the rape of a fellow PCV. When I arrived at Dr. P's office, he and Nurse E performed a pelvic exam and, with my permission, treated me prophylactically for sexually-transmitted diseases. He also made me feel safer, by inviting my sister and me to stay with him and his wife. I was not, however, given the option of a forensic rape exam, as neither Dr. P nor Nurse E were trained or equipped to perform one.

During the few days I stayed with Dr. P, I saw a few of my PCV friends. But I do not recall a visit, or even a telephone discussion, with another other Peace Corps staff member, even the Country Director. I do not recall anyone speaking to me about whether or not I wanted to prosecute the perpetrator or what I might need to do to preserve that option. I do not recall making a formal statement to anyone, or being given the option of doing so. Dr. P arranged for my medical evacuation to Washington, D.C. within a few days. I was put on an international flight to D.C., via Paris, alone.

Despite the absence of any support from the remainder of the Peace Corps' staff, I know I was lucky that my experience with the in-country doctor was positive. Many volunteers have not had the same experience. As a mental health professional, I can now see that, immediately following the rape, I was in the acute phase of my response to the trauma. From the outside, I appeared as if I were functioning. But inside, I was numb; I felt nothing. At some level, I did not believe what had happened to me. I kept playing it over and over again in my mind, blaming myself and trying to understand how I could have been so stupid. This is a very typical response for a victim of rape, or of any severe physical assault. At first, survivors are almost in denial about what occurred. Then, they try to make sense of what happened and, in doing so, obsessively examine how their own actions might have contributed to the assault. This is why survivors are so vulnerable to others' reactions in the acute aftermath of an assault.

Over a decade of research has demonstrated that social support, which empowers survivors in the immediate aftermath of an assault, is key to promoting long-term recovery. In fact, a meta-analysis of risk factors for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) identified social support in the aftermath of a trauma as one of the primary determinants of whether a survivor develops PTSD.[1, 2] PTSD is a mental disorder that develops in response to a traumatic event, such as sexual assault. PTSD is characterized by three clusters of symptoms: (1) re-experiencing symptoms, in which the survivor relives the trauma in her thoughts and dreams, unable to get it out of her mind; (2) avoidance and numbing symptoms, in which the survivor avoids people, places, and anything that reminds her of the trauma, and shuts off her emotional responses; and (3) hyper-arousal symptoms, in which the survivor experiences difficulty concentrating, constant feelings of being on-guard and in danger, difficulty sleeping and irritability. In order to be officially considered PTSD, these symptoms must occur for at least a month and interfere with the individual's ability to function in daily life.[3] An important point to note about PTSD is that, although almost all women who are raped show PTSD-like symptoms in the first days and weeks after an assault,[4] only about half go on to develop the actual disorder.[5] Much research has focused on which factors influence the risk of developing PTSD following an assault and, as mentioned above, social support in the aftermath of trauma is key.

Because of these survivor realities, the Peace Corps staff's in-country response to rape survivors is vital to guiding both the physical and psychological recovery of survivors. Peace Corps' in-country personnel need training on how to best respond to sexual assault survivors. Of course, a survivor's safety must be the Peace Corps' first priority. Once survivors are safe, the Peace Corps should inform them about and provide access to prophylactic treatment for sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy. They should also provide survivors with access to a post-rape exam to preserve evidence that can be used in court. In-country doctors must be provided with the training and resources they need to do this. Research has shown that—done in a way that fully informs the survivors of the process—forensic rape exams can improve a survivor's recovery.[6] But, in addition to their duty to take the necessary physical precautions, Peace Corps' in-country staff also have the opportunity to jump-start the recovery process by giving survivors the proper emotional and social support. They must treat the survivor with concern and respect. They should alleviate, rather than compound, the self-blaming survivors are prone to experience. They should provide the survivor with immediate access to an advocate, so the survivor doesn't feel like she is navigating her recovery alone. The staff should also give the survivor information on the procedures for prosecuting her perpetrator in her country of service. Finally, survivors should be given the option of being accompanied back to the United States by a support person—whether another volunteer or Peace Corps staff member, rather than having to travel alone.

PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS: INSENSITIVE AND INAPPROPRIATE

When I arrived in Washington, D.C., I went immediately to the Peace Corps office. There, I was seen by M, a Peace Corps nurse who managed my "case,"

providing medical and counseling referrals. I don't recall her ever asking me what happened, but she was aware I had been sent to D.C. because I was raped. I assume this information came via the cable sent by Dr. P to D.C. At the time, I was experiencing proto-typical posttraumatic stress symptoms. According to my Peace Corps medical records, I reported "difficulty sleeping, nightmares, reduced appetite, lethargy, sadness, fearfulness, self blame, and hyper-vigilance." I was diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder. According to my journal, I was also experiencing flashbacks of the assault. Moreover, I was very worried about the possibility of having contracted HIV, because A had told me he knew P had been treated repeatedly for STDs and A was very concerned P was HIV positive.

Although the nurse who handled my case was very compassionate, my overall experience with the Peace Corps in DC was negative. In fact, I would say dealing with the Peace Corps in DC was almost worse than the rape itself. No one I dealt with had any experience in working with recently assaulted women. My impression was that the staff members I saw were more concerned about keeping my experience quiet than figuring out the best way to help me. For example:

For medical care, I was sent to a male gynecologist. I was not asked if I was comfortable seeing a man (I would have said no; I had never before seen a male gynecologist, nor have I since.). The gynecologist was completely insensitive to my experience. Specifically, I recall him repeatedly asking detailed questions about my (at that time non-existent) sexual history. I recall finding the pelvic exam incredibly painful (probably because I was anxious) and him telling me to *stop being hysterical and just calm down*. I do not recall being given any information about sexually-transmitted diseases, potential disease symptoms, or HIV testing. In fact, no one at the Peace Corps ever mentioned HIV testing at all as far as I can recall—I ended up obtaining an HIV test on my own after I returned home to New Jersey. Overall, I remember my visit to the gynecologist as a horrible and re-traumatizing experience.

For psychological treatment, I was referred to a counselor who I was told I had to see if I wanted to return to Niger (which, at the time, I thought I did). I didn't like or trust her, but I was not given the opportunity to see anyone else. She did numerous things that made me uncomfortable. Without ever asking if it was alright, she hugged me at the beginning and end of each session. She repeatedly told me I was not disclosing enough information. She told me that if I didn't participate in therapy (i.e., if I didn't tell her in greater detail about what had happened), she would not permit me to reinstate. Now, as a licensed clinical psychologist who specializes in trauma treatment, its clear to me that she violated the basic principles of trauma treatment, from inappropriate physical affection to bullying the client into telling her story before she is ready.

Purportedly in furtherance of making the Peace Corps safer for other volunteers, I was also sent to speak with a staff member of the Inspector General's Office. This experience was a particular low in my mind. I went to her having been told that she was trying to learn more about the negative in-country experiences of female Peace Corps Volunteers, in order to improve our situation. It was clear from the beginning of the

meeting, however, that her interest was in discrediting my story. When she asked why I was there, I told her I had been raped in Niger and had been sent to talk to her. I can still clearly remember how she responded. She said: "I am so sick of you girls going over there, drinking, dancing and flirting, and then, if a guy comes on to you, you say you have been raped when you have lead them on." I was stunned—both that she would say this and that she clearly knew nothing and wanted to know nothing about my particular experience. She then told me she wanted me to write a "confidential" report for internal purposes. By this time, I was together enough to know that her behavior and this request were completely wrong and ill-motivated. My father helped me find an attorney, and all subsequent dealings with the IG went through her.

In addition to the failure of its formal procedures to contribute to my recovery, the Peace Corps rejected requests for less formal assistance. While in D.C., I met several other women who had been medically evacuated for sexual assault. Since there were a number of us, we requested that the Peace Corps form a support group. The Peace Corps refused. We then decided to form our own group and requested that the Peace Corps provide us with a room in which to meet. Again, the Peace Corps refused. The Peace Corps' lack of support notwithstanding, some of us started meeting informally outside of the Peace Corps office.

The Peace Corps' legal "assistance" was equally disappointing. When I decided I wanted to prosecute my perpetrator—encouraged by two other female PCV's who had been raped and had prosecuted—my statement was given to the police in Niger who apprehended and questioned P. He was released after questioning. After this, I spoke with the American in-country Peace Corps director about my case. I said I wanted to prosecute, and he responded: "It's your word against his. He said you wanted to have sex and we believe him." It was at that point that I decided I needed to give up on the Peace Corps and return home to New Jersey.

When, as a mental health professional, I look back at the treatment I received from the Peace Corps in D.C., I am horrified. The Peace Corps' response was not only cavalier but damaging.

COMING HOME

I returned to my parents' home in New Jersey with the booklet the Peace Corps provides to returned volunteers, and nothing else. No efforts were made to refer me to a qualified therapist or medical professional in New Jersey. I recall feeling completely hopeless about myself and my future. My professional dreams of doing development work in Africa were shattered. For the first time in my life, I was neither working nor in school. I was someone who had always had clear goals and plans for the future and now had no idea what I was going to do next. My journal entries from this time are filled with references to suicide. I clearly needed help but had never been in any kind of therapy and did not know even how to go about finding a therapist.

Not long after my return home, a close family friend, whom I had known since childhood, asked me to visit her. She asked me to come alone, because she wanted to speak with me privately. She told me she had been raped by her boyfriend when she was a teenager. She cried while she told me and said I was only the third person she had told. She said she didn't want me to end up like her and begged me to get help. She then got me the name of a psychologist, Dr. L, and made me promise I would go see her. I called Dr. L the next day.

After my experience with the Peace Corps' counselor in D.C., I was dreading going to Dr. L. I can still recall the feeling of relief I had when I entered her office. Her demeanor was quiet but warm. She let me talk about my experiences—the rape, the Peace Corps, being home—at my own pace. I started seeing her twice a week. The Peace Corps had made no effort to educate me in the process of obtaining workers compensation to cover my therapy. However, Dr. L patiently went through all the materials with me and helped me fill out the forms.

Dr. L's letter to the PC dated April 4, 1992 reads:

> *Ms. Karestan Koenen is in individual psychotherapy with me. She comes to sessions twice per week and I have seen her six times. She is clearly suffering from the traumatic consequences of her rape. Focus of the sessions has been on exploring ways of helping her deal with her depression, her feelings of worthlessness, her continuous thinking about her rape, her social withdrawal, her guilt, her lack of trust in her herself and in those around her, and her helplessness to go on with her life.*
>
> *Karestan's work related paralysis is evident as she can not muster her internal, not her external resources to explore work opportunities. This aspect of her life will be addressed through specific career counseling techniques and by the use of vocational tests. . . .*

Over the next months, my therapy with Dr. L focused on helping me come to terms with my rape, alleviating my symptoms, and figuring out what I was going to do professionally. She also encouraged me to participate in a counseling group for rape survivors. Through talking with women who had similar experiences, participating in this group helped reduce my shame and self-blame.

As a mental health professional, I am now shocked that I was sent home without a referral for follow-up mental health care. In D.C., and after release from service, a Peace Corps Volunteer who reports an assault should be offered adequate counseling with a therapist who is trained and experienced in treating trauma survivors (http://www.istss.org/Content/NavigationMenu/ISTSSTreatmentGuidelines/PTSDTreatmentGuidelines/default.htm).

I am also disappointed that I was not informed of the Workers Compensation deadlines for submitting claims for the payment of care. It is my belief as a mental

health professional that the Workers Compensation deadlines for obtaining treatment for sexual trauma should be eliminated, as we know from empirical data that many rape survivors do not seek treatment for months or years after the rape. This does not mean they do not need treatment.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

I have been asked what I wish the Peace Corps had done differently in my case. Most fundamentally, I wish the Peace Corps had been on my side. The compassion of Dr. P and Nurse E in country aside, I found dealing with the Peace Corps a constant battle in which I was persecuted as if I were the criminal, rather than supported as the survivor.

At the most fundamental level, I was disempowered by not being given basic choices about my medical and psychological care. I was discouraged from prosecuting. I was accused by an individual in the IG's office—the very office charged with investigating Peace Corps misconduct and protecting volunteers—of causing the rape. I was told by my Country Director that the Peace Corps was siding with my attacker. Any efforts I made, along with other volunteers, to obtain support, were thwarted at every level. I wish this had all been different.

My experience with the Peace Corps was a second assault, almost eclipsing the first, because it was perpetrated by an institution I thought I knew and trusted. The Peace Corps' behavior towards me and other volunteer survivors was nothing short of shameful.

Fear of being disbelieved or blamed, as I was by the Peace Corps, is exactly why so many survivors do not report their rapes. The Department of Justice estimates that 60% of all rapes are not reported to either police or medical personnel.[7, 8] The Pentagon estimates that 80% of rapes in the military go unreported.[9] And when rapes are reported, only a small minority (5-8%) of rapists ever spend a day in prison. This data from the Department of Justice and the Pentagon suggests that the number of rapes of Peace Corps Volunteers are grossly underestimated; the real number is likely to be 2 to 5 times that reported. This is a travesty, and one that cannot be amended while people and institutions whom survivors trust and turn to offer disbelief or indifference, rather than support and protection. The Peace Corps, an organization known for its compassion and humanity, should be a leader in demonstrating how institutions should respond to harms inflicted on their members. Instead, for me and others, the Peace Corps demonstrated cold indifference.

By blaming survivors, discrediting our experiences, and failing to provide adequate recovery services, the Peace Corps exacerbated our suffering. What shocked me most when hearing the stories of the other survivors here today, and those told in the affidavits sent here from women all across this country, were the similarities in our experiences. For almost 20 years, I thought my experience with the Peace Corps was

uniquely horrible and invalidating. But its clear that, 20 years later, the Peace Corps still lacks understanding about how to protect and help assault survivors. Carol experienced the same denial and blame in the decade before me, as did Jess in the decade after.

Practically speaking, there are so many tangible improvements the Peace Corps should make to improve its policies. The culture of the Peace Corps needs to be transformed from one that blames survivors to one that supports them. In order to accomplish this, the Peace Corps should take the recommendations of Jess and of First Response Action.
(http://firstresponseaction.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=63&Itemid=67)

Peace Corps' in-country personnel need training on how to best respond to sexual assault survivors. I have recently reviewed the Peace Corps' current sexual assault response policies, as well as the video shown to current volunteers during their training. Both are woefully inadequate and, in some parts, actively harmful. I have attached to my testimony letters from other experts expounding on the shortcomings of these training materials. I hope you and Director Williams will read each of them, as their critiques are thoughtful and compelling.

In-country doctors need to be trained in performing post-rape exams so that evidence can be collected for use in court. Recently assaulted volunteers need to be given clear information and access to prophylactic treatment for sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy. They should also be given information on the procedures for prosecuting their rapists in their countries of service.

In D.C. and in regions throughout the world, the Peace Corps should hire advocates for assault survivors who can support and inform them. Advocates should also protect the survivors' ability to make choices about their in-country post-reporting procedures, their domestic appointments upon return, and even their post-service care.

In D.C. and after release from service, any Peace Corps volunteer who reports an assault should be offered adequate counseling with a therapist who is trained and experienced in treating trauma survivors.
(http://www.istss.org/Content/NavigationMenu/ISTSSTreatmentGuidelines/PTSDTreatmentGuidelines/default.htm).

Further, the workers compensation deadlines for obtaining treatment should be eliminated, as we know from empirical data that many rape survivors who genuinely need treatment do not seek it for months or years after the rape.

Finally, the Peace Corps should facilitate, rather than discourage, interaction among volunteers who have experienced assault.

All of these improvements are both necessary and realistic.

I am proud to be a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer. I still believe that the Peace Corps embodies America's best ideals: dignity, humanity, and compassion. But I don't believe the Peace Corps can effectively promote those ideals without practicing them first. I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about my experience. I hope it will help illustrate the gravity of the problem, the need for change, and the path to a better, stronger, safer Peace Corps.

1. Ozer EJ, Best SR, Lipsey TL, Weiss DS. Predictors of posttraumatic stress disorder and symptoms in adults: A meta-analysis. *Psychol Bull* 2003; **129:** 52-73.

2. Brewin CR, Andrews B, Valentine JD. Meta-analysis of risk factors for posttraumatic stress disorder in trauma-exposed adults. *J Consult Clin Psychol* 2000; **68:** 317-336.

3. American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Fourth Edition*. Author: Washington, D.C., 1994.

4. Rothbaum BO, Foa EB, Riggs DS, Murdock T, Walsh W. A prospective examination of post-traumatic stress disorder in rape victims. *Journa of Traumatic Stress* 1992; **5:** 455-475.

5. Kessler RC, Sonnega A, Bromet E, Hughes M, Nelson CB. Posttraumatic stress disorder in the National Comorbidity Survey. *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 1995; **52:** 1048-1060.

6. Resnick H, Acierno R, Waldrop AE, King L, King D, Danielson C *et al.* Randomized controlled evaluation of an early intervention to prevent post-rape psychopathology. *Behav Res Ther* 2007; **45**(10)**:** 2432-2447.

7. Kilpatrick DG, Saunders BE, Veronen LJ, Best CL, Von JM. Criminal victimization: lifetime prevalence, reporting to police, and psychological impact. *Crime and Delinquency* 1987; **33**(4)**:** 479-489.

8. Rennison CM. Rape and sexual assault: Reporting to police and medical attention, 1992-2000. 2002.

9. Gibbs N.
Sexual Assaults on Female Soldiers: Don't Ask, Don't Tell. *Time Magazine*. Time: New York, 2010.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you for those recommendations. Very useful.

Ms. Marsh?

STATEMENT OF MS. JENNIFER WILSON MARSH, HOTLINE AND AFFILIATE SERVICE DIRECTOR, RAINN

Ms. MARSH. Good morning, Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Member Berman, and distinguished members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me to speak today.

Before I begin, I would like to take a moment to commend the women who have spoken before me for their courage and eloquence.

My name is Jennifer Wilson Marsh, and I am the National Sexual Assault Hotline director at the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, or RAINN, the nation's largest anti-sexual assault organization. RAINN is recognized by the Justice Department and Congress as a leader in the field of sexual assault services and has provided thousands of hours of training and technical assistance to sexual assault service providers across the country.

In addition, RAINN has been selected to be a member of the Justice Department's National Victim Assistance Standards Consortium and has assisted more than 1.5 million people affected by sexual violence through the national sexual assault hotlines.

I will begin by outlining several best practices used in serving victims of sexual violence. Peace Corps has a long history of successfully promoting peace around the world. And we believe that if applied correctly, these best practices can strengthen the Peace Corps organization and their response to victims.

I will follow this with a description of how RAINN is currently working with Peace Corps and conclude with my recommendations.

The following best practices are drawn from Department of Justice standards. Accessibility of quality advocacy services following an assault is paramount. The value of these services is lost if victims do not know of their existence.

Peace Corps volunteers need to receive through layered and repeated trainings information describing services available to them in the event they are assaulted. This training should also include a comprehensive overview of issues surrounding sexual violence and risk reduction strategies. We are familiar with the bystander intervention training that Peace Corps is currently developing for volunteers and believe that this is an effective model for risk reduction.

All staff members who may be first responders should receive a minimum of 40 hours of training and complete annual refresher courses. Training should focus on the special needs of sexual violence victims and be reinforced by all Peace Corps administrative policies and procedures.

A sexual response team, or SART, model is the most effective approach when responding to sexual assault victims. A SART is most typically comprised of a victim advocate, law enforcement, and a forensic medical examiner. This approach is a streamlined response, thereby minimizing victim retraumatization. And it creates a singular point of contact, allowing the victim to focus on their recovery.

Without a guarantee of confidentiality, victims may not be willing to seek help for fear that their experience will be scrutinized. Control over personal information is not only a matter of privacy; it is also a matter of personal safety. It should be made clear during all trainings how information disclosed will be maintained and shared.

Through the national sexual assault online hotline, we have seen the importance of safe and secure help. With confidential services, victims can discuss concerns and are more likely to report the crime or seek long-term support.

Finally, there needs to be a clear grievance procedure for victims who feel as though they were treated poorly by staff or did not receive an adequate response following their assaults.

On March 23rd, 2011, RAINN and the Peace Corps signed a memorandum of understanding, or MOU, to collaborate and share educational resources and training tools on sexual assault risk reduction and response.

Since the signing of our MOU with Peace Corps, we have been asked to review training content and procedures. While Peace Corps is still in the process of updating and improving their response to victims of sexual assault, we believe that they are moving toward implementing some of these best practices.

As the Committee on Foreign Affairs is charged with general oversight of the Peace Corps, we believe it should do the following: Enact legislation that will ensure that Peace Corps adopts established best practices in victim response and include a mechanism for formalized succession planning, to address high staff turnover due to mandated appointment limits.

We recommend Peace Corps expand on the progress already made with the hiring of a victim advocate with the addition of mobile victim advocates. These trained staff would be able to immediately travel to the location of a volunteer who has been assaulted and provide on-the-ground help, completing the SART model. The staffers in this position should be experienced in navigating foreign, legal, and cultural systems, and victims will benefit from having an advocate negotiate the unique challenges of being victimized abroad.

In conclusion, we believe that Peace Corps is making positive steps in improving its response to victims of sexual assault. The areas of staff and volunteer training, accessibility of services, and clear confidentiality policies are basic tenants of effective service provision for victims of sexual violence.

There are best practices already in existence in the field of victim services that can further assist Peace Corps in updating these aspects of their programs. Implementing these recommendations will help ensure victims will have access to the quality services they need and deserve.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Marsh follows:]

One of "America's 100 Best Charities"
— *Worth* magazine

2000 L Street NW
Suite 406
Washington, DC 20036
p. 202.544.1034
f. 202.544.3556
e. info@rainn.org

Testimony by Jennifer Wilson Marsh
Hotline and Affiliate Service Director, RAINN

May 11, 2011
"Peace Corps at 50"
House Committee on Foreign Affairs

Good morning Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Berman, and distinguished members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. Thank you for the invitation to participate in today's hearing on the Peace Corps at 50.

My name is Jennifer Wilson Marsh, and I am the hotline and affiliate service director of the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, or RAINN. RAINN, the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization, founded and operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline. The hotline is a partnership of 1,100 local rape crisis centers across the U.S., and has provided free, confidential counseling and support to more than 1.5 million victims of sexual violence. RAINN also operates the National Sexual Assault Online Hotline, a secure web-based service that provides help to victims who are more comfortable seeking help online than via telephone. In addition to hotline services, RAINN educates more than 120 million Americans each year about sexual assault prevention and recovery.

I want to begin by outlining several best practices used in serving victims of sexual violence. Peace Corps has a long history of successfully promoting peace and friendship around the world and we believe that, if applied correctly, these best practices can strengthen the Peace Corps organization and their response to victims. I will follow this with a brief description of how RAINN is currently working with Peace Corps, and conclude with key recommendations.

Best Practices in Victim Response

The response and care that a victim receives immediately following an assault can greatly impact their recovery and willingness to participate in an investigation.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime, *Standards for Victim Assistance Programs and Providers*, accessibility of quality advocacy services following an assault is paramount, to diminish the short- and long-term impacts of trauma.[1] RAINN recognized the importance of crisis intervention services for victims and created a way to gain immediate access to crisis support through the

[1] National Victim Assistance Standards Consortium. *Standards for Victim Assistance Programs and Providers*. May 2003. P. 31.

RAPE, ABUSE & INCEST NATIONAL NETWORK
One of "America's 100 Best Charities"
— *Worth* magazine

2000 L Street NW
Suite 406
Washington, DC 20036
p. 202.544.1034
f. 202.544.3556
e. info@rainn.org

National Sexual Assault Online Hotline. Since the launch of the Online Hotline in 2006, we have seen the demand continue to increase and have now served almost 80,000 visitors, as victims choose to reach out for help online following an assault.

It is important to make services accessible to victims, as the value of crisis intervention services is lost if victims do not know of their existence. Peace Corps Volunteers need to receive, as part of their training, information describing the services available to them in the event they, or someone they know, is assaulted as well as the scope and duration of these services. This training should also include general information on victimization, safety planning, risk reduction, an overview of available medical and mental health services, and other relevant information.[2]

To be most effective, this information should be readily accessible to Peace Corps Volunteers at all times and reinforced through their training experience in a layered and meaningful way. We are aware of the extensive amount of training a Peace Corps Volunteer receives and suggest that information relating to sexual assault resources and prevention be not just a singular training but incorporated throughout multiple trainings and refresher courses to ensure the knowledge is not easily forgotten or overlooked. We are familiar with the bystander intervention training that Peace Corps is currently developing for volunteers and believe that this model is an effective approach in risk reduction.

All staff members who may be first responders to a victim following a sexual assault should receive a minimum of 40 hours of training, with at least five hours of refresher training annually.[3] This training should include information on best practices in sexual assault response protocols, safety planning, recognition of and response to trauma, offender behavior, and other information relevant to specific positions, such as forensic exam training for medical professionals.[4]

A Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) model is the most effective, comprehensive approach to victim response following a sexual assault. A SART is most typically comprised of a victim advocate, law enforcement, and a forensic medical examiner. When a victim is identified, whether it is after arriving at an emergency room, through police interaction, or through interactions with an advocacy organization, the SART will be activated and the members will respond with an organized, coordinated response to meet the immediate – and long term needs of the victim. Some of the services that can be provided by the SART include providing information about reporting options, forensic exams and medical treatment, and assistance in coordinating with counseling services, available benefits and overall support. This multidisciplinary team approach results in a more streamlined response to victims thereby minimizing the re-traumatization that

[2] Ibid. P. 34-35
[3] Ibid. P. 40-41.
[4] The Peace Corps Safety and Security Act of 2011 DRAFT

RAPE, ABUSE & INCEST NATIONAL NETWORK
One of "America's 100 Best Charities"
— *Worth* magazine

2000 L Street NW
Suite 406
Washington, DC 20036
p. 202.544.1034
f. 202.544.3556
e. info@rainn.org

may be caused by the process following an assault.[5] The victim advocate is the leader and main point of contact for the SART, and coordinates the response to the victim.

In the days and months following the assault, the victim advocate operates as the single point of accountability for the team, and follows the victim throughout any medical exams, interaction with law enforcement, and assists with accessing mental health services. Anyone specifically serving in a victim advocate role should receive, in addition to the 40 hours of training received by first responders, at least 20 hours of specialized training, have a minimum of two years of experience as a victim advocate, and observation of at least three case interventions.[6] Having a victim advocate there from the beginning of the process through the medical exam, to review and discuss reporting options and have the ability to connect and coordinate the victim with long-term legal and counseling resources, will simplify the recovery process for the victim and allow them to focus on their recovery instead of navigating multiple systems. This is a model that is adaptable to special circumstances and could be modified to fit the needs of those assaulted in the Peace Corps.

Because sexual assault is a violent crime and such an extreme violation of one's privacy, rape victims often suffer a wide range of effects following an assault. Without a guarantee of confidentiality, sexual assault victims may not be willing to disclose personal information for fear that their experience will be scrutinized or in some way negatively effect them further. One of the most important considerations for a victim when deciding whether or not to reach out for help is how the information they provide will be used and shared. This need has been supported statutorily, as 39 states, plus DC and Puerto Rico, have recognized the interactions between a victim and a rape crisis counselor to be deserving of some level of protection. The issue of control over one's personal information is not only a matter of privacy, it is also related to personal safety. Therefore, it should be made clear during trainings for both staff and Peace Corps Volunteers how exactly information disclosed in this context will be maintained and shared with others and all possible attempts to keep this information private and secure should be made.[7]

We have seen through the National Sexual Assault Online Hotline that almost 80 percent of users say they will utilize resources provided to them during Online Hotline sessions. These visitors came to the Online Hotline to ask questions in a secure and anonymous environment prior to reaching out to in-person support services or to the legal system. By providing accurate information and emotional support in an anonymous manner the likelihood that these victims will report increases. Many victims blame their own actions for causing the assault, which can lead them to not report or access available services. Through anonymous and confidential services, victims can discuss these concerns and know that what happened was in no way their fault, thereby eliminating one of the barriers to reporting.

---

[5] Office for Victims of Crime. SART Toolkit: Resources for Sexual Assault Response Teams. http://ovc.ncjrs.gov/sartkit/about/about-sart.html. March 2011.
[6] National Organization for Victim Assistance. National Advocate Credentialing Program. http://www.trynova.org/nacp/. September 2008.
[7] National Victim Assistance Standards Consortium. P. 37.

RAPE, ABUSE & INCEST NATIONAL NETWORK
One of "America's 100 Best Charities"
— *Worth* magazine

2000 L Street NW
Suite 406
Washington, DC 20036
p. 202.544.1034
f. 202.544.3556
e. info@rainn.org

Finally, even the best victim response programs may experience problems at times. For this reason, there needs to be a clear grievance procedure for victims who feel as though they were treated poorly by staff, or did not receive an adequate or appropriate response following their assault.[8] This ensures that any response issues are addressed and rectified and will lead to improved services for victims in the future.

RAINN and Peace Corps

RAINN began meeting with Peace Corps staff on a regular basis in February 2011. Peace Corps approached us in what we believe to be an effort to improve their response to Peace Corps Volunteers who are victims of sexual assault.

On March 23, 2011, RAINN and the Peace Corps signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to collaborate and share educational resources and training tools on sexual assault prevention and response. Through this partnership, RAINN will provide Peace Corps with expertise on Peace Corps' sexual assault prevention and response training for Peace Corps Volunteers and staff.

As part of this partnership, RAINN will provide Peace Corps with guidance on the development of an enhanced sexual assault prevention and response program. In return, Peace Corps will share information with RAINN on cross-cultural issues of sexual assault risk reduction and response in other countries.

Since the signing of our MOU with Peace Corps, we have been asked to review and give comment on revised training policies and procedures. While Peace Corps is still in the process of updating and improving their response to victims of sexual assault, we believe that they are moving closer towards implementing some of the best practices I mentioned earlier.

Recommendations

As the Committee on Foreign Affairs is charged with general oversight of the activities and programs of the Peace Corps, we believe it should do the following:

Enact legislation that will ensure that Peace Corps adopts established best practices in victim response. This is especially important given the time-limited appointments that Peace Corps places on its staff. While we believe the current Director and other leadership staff at Peace Corps are working towards improving their response to victims of sexual assault, we want to ensure that institutional knowledge regarding what is being done remains in place once the current Director and staff have left. This legislation should also include a mechanism for formalized succession planning, to ensure that knowledge gained during the tenure of outgoing staff can be passed down to incoming staff.

[8] Ibid. P. 44.

RAPE, ABUSE & INCEST NATIONAL NETWORK
One of "America's 100 Best Charities"
— *Worth* magazine

2000 L Street NW
Suite 406
Washington, DC 20036
p. 202.544.1034
f. 202.544.3556
e. info@rainn.org

The Peace Corps has made progress by hiring a dedicated victim advocate. We believe that the person in that role will be more successful with the addition of one or two deployable victim advocates, trained staffers who can immediately travel to the location of a volunteer who has been assaulted and provide direct, on-the-ground help.

While we recognize the difficulty of our current economic situation, having help on-site, as in the SART model I discussed earlier, will complement the help available from Peace Corps headquarters and ensure that victims receive the care they need. The presence of the victim advocate both on the ground with the victim in addition to a long-term support resource would strengthen the SART model they are working towards. These victim advocates will be activated when a Peace Corps Volunteer is assaulted and will have the ability to fly to personally assist the victim through the process. The staffers in this position should be experienced in navigating foreign legal and cultural systems. Cultural and geographic issues can play a large role in the response provided to victims in the Peace Corps. A Peace Corps Volunteer who is a victim of sexual assault will benefit from having a victim advocate who is familiar with the culture, legal environment, language, and resources unique to that victim's circumstances.

In conclusion, we believe that Peace Corps is making positive steps in improving its response to victims of sexual assault. The areas of staff and volunteer training, accessibility of services, and clear confidentiality policies are basic tenants of effective service provision for victims of sexual violence. There are best practices already in existence in the field of victim services that can further assist Peace Corps in updating these aspects of their programs. Implementing these recommendations will ensure all those who are victims of sexual assault while serving in the Peace Corps will have access to the quality services they need and deserve.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much to all of you for your brave testimony. Thank you for appearing before our committee today. Your testimony is going to make a big difference.

Mrs. Puzey, I wish to offer you my most sincerest condolences on the loss of your brave daughter. Your testimony will change the way that business is being done in the Peace Corps. You are very brave to come before us. I am sorry you only have 5 minutes to describe what a dreadful life-changing experience it has been for your family.

And I know that the criminal case is about to begin in your daughter's case. I don't know if that is true, but I don't want your testimony to have any negative influence on that. Perhaps you could explain to us what you think in detail needs to change in the Peace Corps that would prevent such a terrible travesty to occur again.

Mrs. PUZEY. Well, as I said in my testimony, I really feel like that it is important to have those whistleblower protections in place and also training procedures and not just training procedures, of course, for the volunteers so they know their avenues, they know how to report, but it is also very important the staff does know what to do, particularly people in positions like the country director, so that they will know how to handle a situation when it comes to them. I think that is very, very important.

And then, of course, on the other side, to be sensitive to victims' families, I have always said that Peace Corps—you know, when everything is going right, the Peace Corps is one of our country's best ideas, but, you know, when things go wrong, that is where that component, that response component, needs to be improved.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much.

Dr. Koenen, I wanted to ask you about the blaming the victim and how that would impact the recovery of victims of assault, sexual assault, or any kind of crime committed against them. One of the themes in the testimony that we have heard is that the Peace Corps was not equipped to handle the complaints, did not act on it, the accusations were not taken seriously, and, more than anything, it was the blame the victim that was at play here.

Can you tell us how blaming the victim impacts the recovery of the victims of sexual assault?

Dr. KOENEN. Yes. Thank you, Chairman. The social support or the reaction that a survivor receives in the acute aftermath of an assault, so immediately within hours, 24 hours, is the key factor in determining whether she or he will have long-term mental health consequences or not. And the reason is that in that acute period, the victim is incredibly vulnerable. She is in fight or flight mode. And she is playing over in her head "Why did this happen to me? How did this happen to me?"

And it is by nature when something terrible happens, we question ourselves and we question our behavior. And then when you meet a provider, who, rather than ask you questions about "How can we keep you safe? What do you need? Here are some choices on what you would like to do," the blaming the victim just adds to that questioning of your own behavior and you end up internalizing that blame. And psychologically that can keep you from talking to anyone else about it. It can keep you from seeking help that you

need because you are worried that other people are going to respond the same way. And long term it can negatively affect your mental health.

It is a big predictor of post-traumatic stress disorder. In fact, blaming the victim after assault increases the risk of post-traumatic stress disorder more than the characteristics of the assault, more than whether the victim is physically injured, more than whether there is penetration or not. It is really the key factor in whether the victim will recover or not.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much.

And, lastly, Ms. Smochek, I wanted to allow you to comment on the type of safety and security information that was included in your handbook and welcome materials. Did you find that to be useful?

Ms. SMOCHEK. In my handbook, there was just a very general fact sheet I would say. There was no clear-cut who to call when something happens. There were no steps in place. You know, if a crime is committed, who do you call? Where do you need to go to find it? You know, how do you find a safe place? How is your confidentiality going to be kept? None of that was in there. You know, buried deep within the packet was a number for I believe the OIG's office in Washington, DC.

So as a survivor, you know, after you have been raped and sexually assaulted, to have to go through your handbook to try to find a number to call in DC is ludicrous. Many volunteers don't have cell phones or cell phone, you know, don't have electricity or capability to make that type of phone call. So I feel that it was very inadequate.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much. Thank you, ladies.

Mr. Berman?

Mr. BERMAN. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

And I just want you to know that I think your testimony today and the other things you have done will work to empower other victims and also I think have helped to motivate the Peace Corps to make sure that people who will suffer from your experience get the assistance that they are entitled to.

And, Mrs. Puzey, I just want you to know I think the world will miss your daughter's hope and sense of community and her commitment to public service. We all lose when a young person with such energy and promise is taken from us.

Ms. Marsh, you touched on this in your testimony, but could you take a moment just to talk about your evaluation of what the Peace Corps is starting to put in place once again and what they need to do and particularly focus on this issue of whether one person based in Washington with this responsibility is enough or do we need—you talked about a notion of roving personnel that can go to the site and make sure that the country director, the program director, the people involved, the medical officer, are operating correctly.

Ms. MARSH. In terms of the work that we have done with Peace Corps so far, I was invited several weeks ago to participate in their bystander intervention training, which is a model used for risk re-

duction or prevention of sexual assault. And I found that to be a really positive experience.

In terms of the victim advocate, I do feel like having the victim advocate here in DC is a step in the right direction. However, as mentioned by the women before me, I feel as though having somebody on the ground in person is crucial and somebody who doesn't have collateral duty.

So cross-training a medical officer to also be a victim advocate or security officer to be a victim advocate I don't feel is adequate. I believe the victim advocate needs to be solely responsible for the entire and holistic approach to case management and victim services. So if it is having a victim advocate here who oversees victim advocates in the field, whether they are mobilized when an assault occurs and can travel to accompany the victim or if they are based in the region, I believe those are different options to explore, but I believe that that is imperative to a successful sexual assault response.

Mr. BERMAN. And then I would like to ask any of the witnesses if Congress based on what we have heard today and other information about this decides to embark on a legislative implementation and mandate for the best practices that Ms. Marsh talked about to become the enforced policy of the Peace Corps to institutionalize it, as a number of you have mentioned, like us, directors come and go and creates an institutional basis for these best practices and funds what needs to be done here, do you think that that can significantly reduce the situations that you found yourselves in or should we just end this program?

Dr. KOENEN. I would like to speak to that. I am sure the other witnesses would as well. I want to say I love the Peace Corps and I support the Peace Corps. And I would be devastated if my testimony were used to stop Peace Corps funding, cut funding, or eliminate the Peace Corps.

What we want is a stronger, safer Peace Corps. What we need is legislation to cement the changes that RAINN and First Response Action have recommended so that when directors come and go, when times change, when budget priorities change, that crime is prevented and victims are treated adequately so that they can have the best chance at recovery.

And I can speak in my case. If the changes proposed by First Response Action and the ones I outlined in my testimony were in place, they were legislated when my assault occurred, my recovery would have been faster and much better because every single thing they recommended would have completely changed my experience with Peace Corps DC. Just the implementation of regional victims' advocate would have transformed all of our experiences.

And I know that budget priorities are tight right now, but the cost of doing nothing is far higher. You see the cost in the witnesses for today.

Mr. BERMAN. Anyone else in the 15 seconds I have left?

Ms. CLARK. I would like to say that I would be heartbroken for my testimony to be used to destroy an institution that I absolutely love. I still believe in the ideals of the Peace Corps. We as an agency of Peace Corps are there to show the rest of the world the best parts of the United States. Peace Corps is there to make changes

in the world for better, to provide education, to provide ways for people to learn to have a decent living, income that will promote communities around the world to become more economically self-sufficient.

I do not have the goal of destroying the Peace Corps. My goal is to make the Peace Corps better, to help them provide better responses. We can't stop all sexual assaults and violence from occurring. The key is to provide strong, effective best practices when problems do occur.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much.

Judge Poe?

Mr. POE. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you once again for holding this hearing.

And I appreciate all of you all for being here today. I appreciate your courage. But also, Ms. Clark, I appreciate your service in the Peace Corps. I agree with you totally and the doc here that the answer is not to get rid of the Peace Corps. The answer is to make it better and safer for, as I say, America's angels abroad. That is who you all are. And Kate was the same way.

Mrs. Puzey, what is the one thing you want to hear from the Peace Corps Director?

Mrs. PUZEY. Well, Director Williams did give us an apology, but the apology that we have heard from the Peace Corps has been if there was anything that we felt was not compassionate, they are very sorry. And I have never doubted the compassion of Director Williams or the present staff. But what we really would like to hear is an apology and to acknowledge any actions on the part of the Peace Corps that were responsible for my daughter's death.

Mr. POE. I hope you get that apology from the Peace Corps.

Mrs. PUZEY. Thank you. I do, too.

Mr. POE. Dr. Koenen, let me ask you something about the victims of sexual assault. And I think it is awful that the sexual assaults occur. A hundred and twenty-two occurred in the Peace Corps that they admit in 2009 overseas. But this is a unique crime in my opinion based on my experience on the bench in Texas for a long time, because of the way it affects the emotional stability or the inner spirit of a crime victim.

Would you agree or not—and elaborate—on the fact that victims, like Peace Corps victims that are sexually assaulted, want the Peace Corps and us to give them validation for what happened to them; in other words, to support their side, so to speak, as opposed to immediately distancing them from us and making them at fault, making them feel that it is their fault that a crime was committed against them? Is that part of what we need to do as a society and the Peace Corps to support the validation of what they say?

Dr. KOENEN. Absolutely. Victims of sexual assault, all victims of sexual assault in the Peace Corps, need to know from their initial contact with someone after the assault that the Peace Corps is on their side, that they are not the criminal. I think in all of our cases, we have felt like we were the criminals. And rape is always the responsibility of the perpetrator.

The Peace Corps needs to change the culture so that victims know that the Peace Corps is on their side. And that is crucial for,

as you know from your work, crucial for the recovery of the victim. It is essential. And it is a unique crime in that way.

Mr. POE. Do you think that the Peace Corps as we see it now, based on your all's testimony and things that you are aware of, needs really a change in mindset, that the Peace Corps needs to have a mindset different about when crime is committed against a Peace Corps volunteer somewhere in the country, somewhere in the world and, rather than say, "Oh, don't say anything. We might hurt our diplomatic relationship with this Third World country," and all of these other excuses you have heard? Do we need a mindset in the Peace Corps, do you think, change in mindset?

Dr. KOENEN. The Peace Corps needs a change in mindset and a change in culture from victim blaming to supporting victims. And we are all fond of talking about the Peace Corps family. And we need to act like a functional family in which if one of us is hurt, the family comes to our support, rather than treating us like criminals.

Mr. POE. Ms. Marsh, a couple of questions. Do you think that we can fix this problem and support the Peace Corps internally; in other words, change policy in the Peace Corps, or do we need legislation?

Ms. MARSH. I do believe that we need legislation, again, as we have mentioned before, because of the appointment turnover. We have heard in our meetings with Peace Corps about programs or policies that may have been done previously, but it was unclear who was responsible for them or the people that were responsible for them have since left. So I think that legislation is the best way to guarantee that these best practices stay permanent, in place, and institutionalized through all layers of the Peace Corps.

And along with that notion is the training, not only of first responders, country directors, but anybody in the Peace Corps who may come into contact with a victim. And the training should be layered throughout the Peace Corps experience, not just one singular training on this issue.

Mr. POE. Thank you.

Madam Chair, without objection, I would like to introduce three other statements from Peace Corps volunteers that have come to my attention, but they want to keep their names anonymous. And I would like to submit their stories for the record.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Without objection.

[The statements offered by Mr. Poe follow:]

Questions/Statement for the Record of the Honorable Ted Poe
Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives
Hearing: "Peace Corps at 50"
May 11, 2011

- A woman, let's call her Sarah Lee, who is serving in the Peace Corps in a foreign country right now contacted me. Sarah Lee loves her job and the organization, but can't get passed the fact that she feels completely unsafe.
- "Throughout my service," she writes, "I have witnessed the sorry manner in which volunteers are regarded, treated, and protected by Peace Corps. It is patently false that volunteers in X country could ever be regarded as 'safe.'"
- Last year, Sarah Lee was assaulted by another volunteer that was old enough to be her father. They were staying at another volunteer's house and she fell asleep on the couch. She was awakened in the middle of the night to the assailant on the couch next to her, her clothes having been moved around and him inappropriately touching and kissing her.
- She reported this to national Peace Corps staff, and talked to several members of the executive staff, as well as the Peace Corps Medical Officer. She was told to not leave her village. Another volunteer came to stay with her because she was having anxiety attacks and insomnia and didn't want to be alone.
- While Peace Corps was investigating, the accused volunteer was traveling the country, staying at overnight PC houses in bedrooms occupied by female volunteers.
- The investigators assigned to her case were terrible. Because she was from Texas, they asked if she didn't have more "conservative" notions of propriety than the perpetrator- as if this was just a violation of her southern sensibilities and the perpetrator had every right to assault her. They also told her she was attractive, so she must be assaulted like this a lot. When she asked about pressing charges, they discouraged her. They said a case like this had never been tried before, that it would be a precedent setting case, and that if she failed, if could hurt future cases.
- Eventually the Peace Corps flew Sarah Lee back to the United States, but her counselor was just as bad as the investigators. While she was sobbing, the counselor kept asking her how she felt. Because a Peace Corps Volunteer can only be kept on medical hold for a certain amount of days, she was rushed back to her country even though she did not feel ready and was still suffering from panic attacks and insomnia. When a fellow in-country volunteer urged her supervisor to give Sarah Lee more counseling, they let her talk to a

counselor twice on the phone before telling her to just email- even though she has drive to the next town for Internet access.

- In the end, the perpetrator quit rather than face being fired. Nothing will appear on his record. Peace Corps never did give Sarah Lee information on how to press charges.
- Sarah Lee also talks about how male teachers at the school she teaches at have repeatedly raped her students, but she can't tell anyone. The Peace Corps still has not provided a mechanism through which volunteers can report crimes without the fear of reprisal.

- Mary Joe, again not her real name, always has wanted to help people. After she graduated from Seattle University, she worked for a year a non-profit that tutored low-income housing kids.
- She joined the Peace Corps the next year because she wanted to help people abroad and, given Peace Corps' reputation, thought this was the safe way to go.
- In 2007, she was sent to Cambine, Mozambique to teach English to high schoolers.
- One night in the fall she went to dinner in the next town over with some fellow volunteers. While at the restaurant, her drink was drugged by a man the group had met there. The next thing she remembers is being in a car with a man sexually assaulting her. A fellow Peace Corps volunteer saw what was going on and pulled her from the car. Mary Joe blacked out again until the next morning, when she woke up and called the Peace Corps medical officer, who told her to come to the capital and get checked out.
- When she arrived the next day, she was denied a rape kit by the medical officer, who said she was drunk- not assaulted. In fact, before he would give her medicine to fight against possible AIDS exposure as a result of the assault, the medical officer made her write down that she was drunk and not raped. She was told to come back in a month to find out if she had AIDS.
- With no further care, it was clear that Mary Joe was not okay. Back at her post, she was startled by and had crying fits over the littlest things, couldn't sleep, was depressed, didn't want to leave her house, and had terrible nightmares. Mary Joe was disoriented and couldn't think clearly for months, yet she was asked to make big decisions. She needed someone intimately familiar with her case who could advocate on her behalf. After 2 weeks, she finally called her country director, who put her in touch with a Peace Corps psychologist in Washington, DC. The psychologist had her medi-vaced back to her hometown in Tucson on Halloween in 2007.

- While in Tucson she was given 3 sessions with a counselor and 3 sessions with a psychiatrist. Following her counselor's recommendation, Mary Joe was medically separated from the Peace Corps.
- Because she was no longer with the Peace Corps, she had to go through the Department of Labor to get her medical care. She was never told that she had to have a psychologist or psychiatrist sign her workers compensation claim, so when she submitted it with her counselor's signature, it was denied. By the time she was able to see a psychologist, it was too late to appeal the claim. She never received any more care from the federal government for her PTSD.

- Billie Jo (not her real name) served in Romania from 1993 to 1995. From the day she arrived until the day she left, she was constantly harassed physically and verbally.
- She couldn't walk out of the house without hearing cat calls. She was spit on, punched, had chestnuts and rocks thrown at her, and her life threatened. She was fondled so much while riding public transportation that she finally gave up and walked everywhere.
- Peace Corps knew sexual assaults were happening to all volunteers and even talked about it in training, but they didn't take it seriously, she said. No legal recourse was offered and when a young man exposed himself to Billie Jo and her friend on the beach, the Peace Corps country director told her to "stay out of harm's way."
- Eventually, Billie Jo requested a new location, Peace Corps staff refused. "No one seemed to care," she explained.
- When she got back to the U.S., Billie Jo had to get counselor services through her own health care insurance because Peace Corps didn't provide any help.
- Billie Jo warned Peace Corps staff not to send women to her post, but they did anyways. The young Jewish woman that came after her returned home after only a few months into her service when swastikas were drawn on her building wall.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Judge. Without objection.

Mr. POE. And I yield back my time. Thank you.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Ms. Wilson of Florida?

Ms. WILSON. Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question is for Ms. Marsh, I guess, who is representing the Peace Corps. And I have a map in front of me that sort of outlines the places where these rapes have occurred. And rape is a horrible crime. It is tantamount to death in my opinion. It is just the killing of the spirit, of the soul of women.

I am just wondering about the local governments. Is there any sort of a compact or contract assigned between local governments and the officials, especially those that are highlighted in red and purple, where most of these rapes have occurred?

And some of them are not that far from the United States. I am looking at the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica. They are in

red. So if these places are this dangerous, what about the local law enforcement and the local elected officials in those countries that are responsible for law and order in their respective provinces or countries? Is there ever any communication with these people pressing charges just as if these people were murdered?

Ms. MARSH. I would just like to clarify before I respond that I am not representing Peace Corps. I am representing RAINN, the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network.

Ms. WILSON. Okay.

Ms. MARSH. So I am going to defer that question to Director Williams and also agree with you that rape and sexual assault is a horrible crime. According to the FBI, it ranks only to homicide in terms of trauma.

Dr. KOENEN. I would like to defer to Director Williams to talk about the specific arrangements in different countries, but I think that what Congress can do and where we can make effective change is through legislation here that will change the Peace Corps' response to rape.

And, as I mentioned in my testimony, there are three things that—I said eight things, but there are three things that can be done right now. They can stop the video that they are showing, "Serving Safely," that blames victims for their assaults. They can end this major and minor distinction of a sexual assault that is again victim-blaming. And I would like to hear a definition from them of a minor sexual assault. And they can provide care and travel companions for survivors.

And those are immediate things that can be done right now while legislation dealing with local law enforcement is very important but a long-term more complex process.

Ms. WILSON. Just a follow-up question. Is there ever any contact at all with—you are talking about intervention after it has happened. What I am trying to ask a question about is prevention. How do we threaten these countries, to say, "We are not sending women to be raped if this doesn't stop?" I mean, "We will pull all of our Peace Corps volunteers out" or are there any sorts of threats or any level that these countries were—and I am talking about the purple and the red.

If you have this map in front of you. It is unconscionable that these many people are being victims and victimized in these countries. Is there any warning that this is a dangerous place to send Peace Corps volunteers who are women?

That is what I am asking: Prevention. I understand what you mean about intervention and what is happening after these rapes occurred, but how do we help prevent some of this? I am at a loss.

Dr. KOENEN. In terms of prevention, what we have talked about, what RAINN talked about, was bystander intervention training with volunteers. Again, the video I have talked about pulling is part of their prevention training.

And I think that the best prevention is that Peace Corps can start treating victims of sexual assault with respect and set an example for people in these countries of how the U.S. expects its volunteers to be treated. If the Peace Corps is mistreating its own victims, then how can we demand the people in these countries to treat the women any better?

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much.

Ms. Schmidt of Ohio?

Ms. SCHMIDT. Thank you. And, first off, the courage of the women up here is astounding. And I hope that the Peace Corps takes note of it.

I have never been so incensed and so enraged at an agency. My rage began before your testimony when I had a constituent a few years ago that just needed to come home 2 days early for her sister's wedding. Her father had died. But the inflexibility of the Peace Corps disallowed her to come home, and she quit the Corps.

And at that time, I thought to myself, "They have really got to get a grip." Well, it is a major grip, not a minor grip, because my message is every woman has the right to say no, no matter how the act occurs or at what point the act is occurring.

And this isn't just an American right. This is a human right. And when you go overseas, you are not just representing American rights and values. You are representing human rights and values. And it is incumbent upon the Peace Corps to understand its own mission. And I applaud you for wanting the Peace Corps to continue while you were so violently attacked and no one came to your aid.

Mrs. Koenen, Dr. Koenen, I applaud what you are saying about changing this video. It needs to be done today, not tomorrow, but today, that there is no difference between major and minor assault. An assault is an assault. And when it does happen, and you have to go back home, sometimes 12–15 hours overseas, you need a companion with you right there. Those are easy fixes. And I want to work with you for legislation to put the Peace Corps on the right track to protect you.

And, Mrs. Puzey, before I finish, I just want to ask you, what do you want from us here today?

Mrs. PUZEY. Whistleblower protection rights and victim rights legislation, both.

Ms. SCHMIDT. Whistleblower rights, protection rights, victim rights?

Mrs. PUZEY. Yes.

Ms. SCHMIDT. I think we can work on that.

And, Madam Chairman, I yield back my time.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Ms. Schmidt.

Mr. Connolly of Virginia?

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

And, again, thank you to all of you for your courage in your testimony here today. And, Mrs. Puzey, our hearts go out to you and your family. And I hope this hearing gives some small comfort that your daughter's memory is not lost and that working together, we can try in her memory to make the Peace Corps stronger and more compassionate.

It seems to me that—you know, I have worked with the Peace Corps for a long time here on the Hill. And I have traveled to many, many Peace Corps missions abroad, met with many volunteers. And your stories are, if you will, sort of an under side of the Peace Corps that obviously troubles all of us.

And we can't make everybody 100 percent safe everywhere. It is not that kind of world. And, frankly, the work of the Peace Corps

puts people in much riskier situations. I mean, I have a daughter at a university here in America. And, sadly, what you described sometimes occurs in U.S. campuses as well. But there is counseling. There are training and awareness programs. There are prevention programs.

And I guess what troubles me the most about your testimony was that there was, frankly, lacking a standard of compassion when somebody signs up as a volunteer and their family supports that effort, understanding the risks. And God forbid something goes wrong.

It seems to me that we drop everything as a Peace Corps family, as you said, Dr. Koenen, and we respond. We take care of the family. We do everything in our power to make sure the system of justice in the host country is working on behalf of that volunteer and his or her family and that everybody in the chain of command, from the medical director to the country director to the people back here, is clued in, is genuinely compassionate and sensitive and working on your behalf. That is the standard we have to reach.

We can legislate. And it sounds today like we need to. But at the end of the day, inculcating that compassion, that empathy, that understanding that, as Judge Poe said, you know, rape is never the victim's fault—we can never accept that—has to be cleared from our minds and the proper perspective adopted always and zero tolerance for any variation from that standard.

I know we are going to hear later from Director Williams about reforms and measures he has put in place. And I have heard the appreciation of Mrs. Puzey for those efforts. And I know that we can and will have to go further.

But I just want you all to know that on a bipartisan basis, we continue to support Peace Corps, as do each and every one of you, but we are also going to make sure that, God forbid—well, first of all, we are going to do everything we can to try to make sure that we are cognizant of risks and dangers. And we are going to minimize them, the goal being to try to get to zero risk. We know that is an elusive goal, but that ought to always be what we are pushing ourselves toward. And then should something happen, the full force of compassion and resources of the Peace Corps and, indeed, of the United States Government are behind you and your families.

Thank you for your testimony today. And I yield back, Madam Chairman.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much.

Ms. Buerkle?

Ms. BUERKLE. Thank you, Madam Chair.

And I would like to thank all of our panelists today for coming here and for sharing your testimony. As a woman and a mother of four children, a grandmother of three granddaughters, it is appalling to me. And it breaks my heart to hear what you have gone through. And, Mrs. Puzey, my deepest condolences on the loss of your daughter as well.

I would like to join in with my colleagues here. And it will be a bipartisan effort to get the legislation in place to do what we need to do to make our volunteers safe and to change what is happening within the Peace Corps.

I have spent over 14 years with pro bono advocacy in domestic violence. So I have a keen awareness that, as my colleague just stated, rape is never the victim's fault. And it cannot be that mentality. And that mindset must never be accepted. So I will work hard with my colleagues to get this legislation passed.

I would like to ask, Dr. Koenen, with regards to healing and recovery, is that possible? And what can we do to help the victims who are suffering?

Dr. KOENEN. Healing is absolutely possible, as is recovery. I think you can see that from the women, the testimonies of the people here who were able to be here and to testify as part of our recovery.

In terms of what we can do, putting the things in place to support a victim's recovery starts before an assault even occurs. That is why we keep reiterating stop victim blaming; training materials; change the mentality of the Peace Corps to one that supports victims from one that blames victims and this distinction between major and minor sexual assault, again which is victim blaming; set in protocols into place in terms of confidentiality so people know their confidentiality will be respected and that we have control over who our stories are told to; provide a support person to travel back to the country; provide adequate support once the victim is back in the country; the victims' advocate to coordinate services across all of these complex systems. So all of those things can aid in recovery. The initial response of Peace Corps staff is key in that.

One of the things I want to assure anyone, not just Peace Corps volunteers, who have experienced a sexual assault is that recovery is 100 percent possible.

Ms. BUERKLE. I just want to comment that I understand your commitment to the Peace Corps. And I understand your desire not to see the Peace Corps disrupted. But, as my colleague Jean Schmidt said, this has to stop. And this legislation and our efforts need to start today, now so that we can make the changes required to prevent any more harm from being done.

Again, thank you all very much for your courage for being here today. And we will look forward to working with you. I yield my time. Thank you, Madam Chair, for——

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you.

Mr. Payne?

Mr. PAYNE. Let me thank all of you for coming. I am familiar with your testimony, although I was not here personally to hear it. I would like to commend each of you and as a very strong supporter of the Peace Corps. I have visited many sites. I have been to graduations of the ceremonies when a new class had their graduation and so much euphoria and pride. In some countries, they make outfits that reflect that particular country. And so I have been a tremendous supporter of the Peace Corps and the tremendous amount of work that you have done and really commend all of you.

I think that part of the problem—you know, and I hear talk about we are going to get this legislation going. Part of the problem basically has been in my opinion the U.S. Congress, U.S. Senate, the House because this is not the first time that we have had these kinds of hearings. Back in 2001, the Dayton News had a 20-month

investigation of Peace Corps. One lady found an answer to something that happened in 1979 from this series run by the Dayton News. And there was going to be reaction. We were going to deal with it in 2001. Then in 2004, Senator Dodd had legislation that was going to go to correct some of these. And it passed the House, but it died in the Senate. Two thousand seven, we had the same thing.

So, you know, when we look at the problems—and it is easy to bash the Peace Corps. And there are probably others who might want to see the program ended, might have been a hidden agenda because we are having tough times at home, so we can't afford to spend a single penny abroad philosophy that I have heard a lot from some newcomers.

But, one, I certainly commend you all for your support of the Peace Corps. First of all, to be in the Peace Corps, you have to be unique in the first place. So I am not surprised how you feel about it.

I guess my own point is that if we are really going to do something, then the Congress has to act. I mean, you can't just blame it on an agency that probably would like to have some of the enforcement that the legislation would do. Of course, they could do things on their own, but if it is backed by the Congress, by law, signed by a President, then you might see something happen. So, one again, we will bash the Peace Corps. They haven't done a good job, which is true in some instances.

So I just hope that there is going to be the will on the part of people who are saying how indignant they are that this is happening. For the last 11 years, I have heard what we ought to do. And we haven't had one single piece of legislation.

So I really don't have any questions. I don't know if any of you would like to comment. Yes?

Mrs. PUZEY. There were whistleblower protections in that 2007 Dodd bill. If you had passed it, it is a possibility that my daughter would still be alive. So I do urge legislation at this time.

Mr. PAYNE. Thank you very much. And I hope that we can. It passed the House, but once again it just languished and died in the Senate. And that is a story of our life. So I really appreciate that.

I will yield back. Thank you.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Smith?

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. And I want to especially thank you for calling this extraordinarily important hearing and for the bravery of the women who have testified here today.

Hopefully this hearing, each of your instances, each of your traumas should have been the game-changers and those of others who have suffered like you have, but if this hearing isn't, I don't know what else could be.

I mean, the legislation is important. I am sure the distinguished gentle lady from Florida will take the lead on this. We know she will. And we will all do our parts. But I hope that the Peace Corps itself will realize that deploying young and very vulnerable young women and men, but mostly women, obviously, to places where there is enhanced risk. Unlike State Department personnel who are deployed, who have access to the compound, they are much

more likely to be in a protective state, get hazardous pay if they are in a more vulnerable deployment area, the Peace Corps volunteers—and the chart certainly shows it. I agree with my colleagues. There are areas of the world that are much more dangerous to women when deployed there. And that ought to be a serious factor to find some other area and locale where these women could be deployed.

Let me just say your testimonies are absolutely chilling. I know every member of this committee and those who will follow this transcript, perhaps they are watching on C–SPAN, will be moved. We need a zero tolerance policy. And that goes throughout the entire process: Training; the assessment of risk; I thought, Ms. Smochek, failure to prepare; failure to protect; the issue of the failure to respond adequately; and then the aftermath, of course, the worst fears realized.

You know, the IG will be testifying shortly. And she points out that since Fiscal Year 2004, the Office of Inspector General has visited 66 posts, made many recommendations. And some 85 percent of the posts were visited. And, yet, 38 percent, 25 out of 66, were found to be deficient in some aspects of their site development. And, as she points out, in appropriate site development increases the risk that a volunteer's community safety net will be compromised if a threat arises.

The conclusion of the OIG is that—and I would appreciate your comments on this—while some important OIG recommendations remain open, the agency has made substantial progress in recent years in developing a comprehensive safety and security program. Do you agree with that?

And, finally, on the issue of harassment, usually an act or acts of sexual assault are preceded by either verbal or some other harassing behavior that is clearly the harbinger of what may be headed toward that individual or individual's way.

Did the Peace Corps personnel to whom you reported to, those who have been so horrifically victimized, take seriously your concerns about the harassment? We know in related issues of sex trafficking and other violence against women, where there is a culture of impunity, very often it just works horizontally to all women, not just those who are bought and sold and turned into commodities under sex trafficking. But when it comes to women who are extending up and going out as ambassadors, as one member said, angels to the world, it seems to me that we have to have zero tolerance with regards to that risk.

So if you could?

Ms. SMOCHEK. Yes. I can certainly speak to the second part. I know from my experience, I was placed at a site with two other female volunteers. And we all received extensive verbal and physical harassment and sexual harassment, even from the very first day. And we kept reporting incidents to the medical officer, to the safety and security officer and just got the same reply of "Just toughen up. And just deal with it."

And I believe that what happened to me, I believe that the—I mean, I was targeted by this group of six men. I believe that my ultimate gang rape by them and near death could have absolutely been prevented. My site was absolutely unsafe. If anyone had actu-

ally come to really look at all of the reports that were being filed and taken them seriously, I mean, we asked. We specifically said, "We are not safe. We do not feel safe. We are going to be harmed." And we were not taken out of this dangerous site.

And so, I mean, that is just a case in how even what is deemed minor sexual harassment or assault can lead, and most of the time can lead, to much greater crimes. And so I think that there definitely has to be more accountability and response for all reports that are submitted. And they need to definitely be followed through. Every single report needs to be followed through or to really ensure the safety of the volunteer.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Smith.

Mr. Rivera?

Mr. RIVERA. Thank you, Madam Chair.

And thank you to the witnesses for testifying here today regarding some horrific circumstances. And, particularly Mrs. Puzey, my condolences to you and to your family. Thank you for coming here today. But also thank you for the service that you desired to give to your country and to other countries, to mankind. I can't imagine a more altruistic sentiment than the ones with which you entered the service in the Peace Corps, particularly since, as has been mentioned, the Peace Corps has been an integral part of the assistance around the world that we provide to other countries. But at the same time, I hope the entire world is listening, particularly those that can make a difference with respect to your circumstances, that they are listening as well.

It is quite concerning to many of us that you all have mentioned many instances, I believe, where perhaps the agency has dragged its feet in implementing systematic reforms with respect to safety. And that is very troubling to us here and I am sure to those who are thinking about volunteering with the organization in the future.

I think the Peace Corps should be held to the highest standard of accountability when it comes to the safety and protection of the volunteers. And we need to make sure that that plan is brought forward and if it hasn't been thus far, that it needs to be, particularly after today's hearing. I would like, I believe—since I am the last questioner on the panel because I don't see Congressman Chabot here, I am very interested in moving forward and hearing from the agency with respect to what you all have been talking about.

So I am not going to ask any questions. I want to help the chair move forward and get to the next panel, but I will give you all since usually witnesses do not get closing statements, I will give you all my last minutes. I have got about three. Maybe each of you could take 30 or 45 seconds. Just let us know your final thoughts. What do we need to do? What do you want to see done?

Ms. SMOCHEK. I will go ahead and start. One thing that——

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. A little closer.

Ms. SMOCHEK. Sorry. One thing that definitely needs to be considered in legislation and has not been really addressed by the Peace Corps in their latest movements forward is the health care services and health care providers within country but also with the United States. And that is really key because they, again, are the

first responders and not only making sure that there are trained people who can work with the survivors but after service how difficult the issue is to navigate the workers' compensation system when you are still in trauma mode. And once you are separated from the Peace Corps, that is it. No one is there. There is no liaison. There is nothing there. You are just left to navigate it completely on your own. Some people get information. Others do not. And it really, you know, can further harm the survivor.

Mr. RIVERA. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Ms. Clark?

Ms. CLARK. One thing I would like to point out is that even this week, we have received new reports of women who have had similar experiences. I think that, as women failed the support of Congress, there will be a spike in reports. I would like that not to be used as an indication that Peace Corps should be disintegrated but, rather, that Peace Corps has taken the chance to reform.

With that in mind, I would say that apologies without action are useless. I have had apology from the Peace Corps. I haven't seen the action. My goal is that we have long-term, not short-term but long-term, action that can be provided through legislation.

Mr. RIVERA. Dr. Koenen?

Dr. KOENEN. I would like to conclude just by saying what we all want is a better, stronger, safer Peace Corps. And we have all come forward with our stories at great personal cost to ask Congress to cement the changes that we request in legislation so that future generations can serve in the Peace Corps and be protected.

Mr. RIVERA. Thank you very much.

Ms. Marsh?

Ms. MARSH. I would like to reinforce what the women who spoke before me said and also go back to my testimony and suggest the Peace Corps follow best practices recommendations and reiterate that I feel as though they are taking steps in that direction. And I believe that this hearing will help them to further that process.

Mr. RIVERA. And, Mrs. Puzey, finally?

Mrs. PUZEY. As has already been said, I think that legislation needs to happen now at this time if reforms are going to be consistent over time. And also from the Peace Corps, I would like to see them be sympathetic and compassionate and give the support to victims' families because things are going to go wrong. So the families should also have that support.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much. Thank you for excellent testimony. Thank you for your courage in appearing before us today. We will work on legislation to move forward. Thank you very much, ladies.

Now I would like to introduce The Honorable Aaron Williams, Director of the Peace Corps. Director Williams was sworn in as Director of the Peace Corps on August 24, 2009, the fourth director in the Peace Corps' history to have served himself as a Peace Corps volunteer.

Mr. Williams served from 1967 to 1970, in the Dominican Republic. Upon completing his service, he became Coordinator of Minority Recruitment and Project Evaluation Officer for the Peace Corps in his hometown of Chicago. Mr. Williams has pursued a career in development, and was awarded the USAID Distinguished Career

Service Award. We thank Mr. Williams for taking the time to appear before this committee. We will consider your testimony as having been printed as full.

And if you would summarize your statement to 5 minutes? And we will ask questions at the appropriate time. So we will just give them a few minutes.

[Pause.]

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. We made good use of our time, didn't we? Thank you, Mr. Williams. You are recognized. And feel free to summarize your statement. Thank you very much, sir, for appearing before us. Thank you, sir.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE AARON S. WILLIAMS, DIRECTOR, PEACE CORPS

Mr. WILLIAMS. Good morning. Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Berman, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify about the steps that Peace Corps has taken to improve the safety, security, support, and care of our volunteers.

I am a returned Peace Corps volunteer. So I am a part of the Peace Corps family. It is an honor to lead this agency that has meant so much to me throughout my life. The health, safety, and support of every member of our Peace Corps family is my number one priority.

Peace Corps volunteers represent the best that America has to offer, and we owe them nothing less in return. We make a commitment to every volunteer that we will support them during and after their service in the same way that every volunteer makes a 27-month commitment to service overseas.

Unfortunately, the Peace Corps has not always lived up to its commitment. The powerful testimony of the courageous witnesses today shows us that the trauma and pain that they experience can be acute and lasting. We sincerely regret that we did not fully appreciate this in the past. It is not our intent to victimize our volunteers a second time. We want to do everything we can to help them heal.

The brave women who have come forward have shown us that the Peace Corps has not always been sufficiently responsive, compassionate, or sensitive to victims of crime and their families. It is heartbreaking to learn that. And I apologize for any additional pain the agency has inflicted on our volunteers.

The victims of sexual assault deserve nothing but compassion and support. Each volunteer is a valued and treasured member of the Peace Corps family. A crime against one is a crime against all of us.

Since the Peace Corps was founded 50 years ago, more than 200,000 Americans have served in 139 countries. We are all enormously proud of their service, both to the United States and to the host nations. Today we have 8,600 volunteers in 77 countries.

Volunteers embody compassion, generosity, and a dedication to our mission of world peace and friendship. It is these qualities that deepen our pain when there is a loss. We care profoundly about the welfare of our volunteers. Every life lost and every act of violence against a volunteer is a tragedy.

I have personally met with the parents of Kate Puzey, the outstanding volunteer who was murdered in March 2009. I assured Mr. and Mrs. Puzey and their son David that the Peace Corps and the United States Government have united with them in seeking justice for Kate.

Lois, Harry, and David have shown incredible strength, and I am deeply grateful to them for helping us to improve the way we handle sensitive information and support the families of fallen volunteers. I regret that the Peace Corps did not do a better job early on in supporting and communicating with them.

My staff and I have also met with a number of returned volunteers who have shared personal experiences of rape and sexual assault. I would like to thank them for their courage in speaking out and for helping us to make needed reforms. They have enlightened us. And they have helped us understand the lasting damage suffered by victims of crime. We do not want those experiences repeated.

The Peace Corps of today takes the issue of sexual assault prevention and response seriously. And we are dedicated to providing compassionate victim-centered support. Since I became Director in August 2009, the Peace Corps has put in place new policies and practices to reduce the risks faced by volunteers and to ensure they receive our full support when a tragedy occurs.

Let me tell you a little about the things we have done. We have issued Peace Corps' commitment to sexual assault victims, a set of core principles to ensure we provide timely, effective, and compassionate support to victims of sexual assault. We have implemented and trained our staff on new guidelines for responding to rape and sexual assault. The guidelines are victim-centered with specific procedures that all of our staff around the world have to follow to respond promptly and provide the best possible support.

The agency's sexual assault working group is developing a comprehensive sexual assault prevention and response program. This group, by the way, includes returned volunteers, survivors of rape and sexual assault, as well as our staff, which has expertise in trauma response.

Since last year, we have been developing comprehensive new training for volunteers before and during their service on sexual assault prevention and response. We will begin rolling this out this summer.

We have signed a memorandum of understanding with RAINN, the nation's largest organization on battling, combatting sexual violence. That is going to be a very important part of our response.

Also, at the response of the brave women of First Response Action, I hired a nationally recognized leader in victims' rights to be our agency's first victims' advocate. She is here with me today. She will make sure that victims of crime get the emotional, the medical, the legal, and other support they need.

At the suggestion of Congressman Poe—and thank you, sir, for your suggestion—I created the Peace Corps volunteer sexual assault panel, made up of outside experts and returned volunteers who were victims of sexual assault, to help us design and implement our sexual assault and risk reduction and response strategies.

Madam Chairman, we are committed to a reform agenda. We have improved the agency's global safety and security program by working to implement the recommendations by our Inspector General that were made in 2010. I believe these reforms will better protect our volunteers around the world. More needs to be done. And I look forward to working with you and others to ensure the continued success of our volunteers. Their willingness to serve our country is an inspiration.

Thank you very much. And I look forward to the questions that you might ask.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Williams follows:]

Testimony of Peace Corps Director Aaron S. Williams
Before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Hearing on "Peace Corps at 50"
May 11, 2011

Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Berman, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the steps the Peace Corps has taken to improve the safety, security, support, and care of our Volunteers.

As Director of the Peace Corps, and as a former Volunteer, I am part of the extended Peace Corps family. The health, safety, and support of every member of that family is my number one priority. Peace Corps Volunteers represent the best America has to offer, and we owe them our best in return.

Peace Corps' Commitment to Volunteers and their Families

We give our Volunteers extensive training and we work hard to make sure that their service is rewarding, productive, and safe. But we recognize that there is always room for improvement. Since I became Director 20 months ago, it has become apparent to me that the Peace Corps has not always been sufficiently responsive or sensitive to victims of crime and their families. I sincerely regret that. None of us wants to inflict any additional trauma upon the victims of crime. That is not Peace Corps policy. That is not the Peace Corps way. All of us, past, present, and future Volunteers, are valued members of the Peace Corps community. A crime against one is a crime against all of us.

Since the Peace Corps was founded 50 years ago, more than 200,000 Americans have served as Volunteers in 139 countries, and we are all enormously proud of their remarkable service to the United States. I know that you share that pride. Volunteers embody compassion, generosity, and an unbridled belief that together we can achieve more than we ever could by working alone. It is these qualities that deepen our pain when there is a loss. We care profoundly about the welfare of our Volunteers. Every life lost and every act of violence against a Volunteer is a tragedy. The names of Volunteers who have died while serving are engraved on a memorial at our headquarters. They are not forgotten.

I have met personally with the parents of Kate Puzey, the outstanding Volunteer who was murdered in Benin in March of 2009. I assured Lois and Harry Puzey that the Peace Corps and the United States Government are united with them in seeking justice for Kate. Lois and Harry have shown incredible strength, and I am grateful to them for helping us to improve how we handle sensitive information and support the families of fallen Volunteers. I thank them for that and I regret that the Peace Corps did not do a better job supporting and communicating with them early on.

The Peace Corps has also met with a number of returned Volunteers who have shared personal experiences of rape and sexual assault. I would like to thank them publically for their courage in coming forward and for helping us to make needed reforms. Their

insights are invaluable and have helped shape our commitment to make the survivor's perspective a critical part of our reforms. I am sorry for what they went through and I am committed to ensuring that their experiences are not repeated.

Over the past 20 months, we have put in place new policies to minimize the risks faced by Volunteers and to improve the way we respond to victims of crime. We have been working closely with our Inspector General's office and have implemented or are implementing all of the recommendations from the Inspector General's report last year on our Volunteer safety and security program. While the Peace Corps cannot eliminate every risk Volunteers face during their service, I am committed to making sure that we do everything we can to protect Volunteers and provide effective support to them and their families when a tragedy occurs.

Implementing a Reform Agenda

The world is more complicated than it was in 1961, and we have tried our best to adapt. Despite our efforts to learn from our experiences, we haven't always succeeded. There is no doubt that the Peace Corps faces challenges. We can, however, do our best to decrease the risks Volunteers face and offer compassionate support. Our Volunteers deserve as much.

Under my leadership, the Peace Corps has taken a number of steps to ensure we fulfill our commitment to Volunteers:

- We trained overseas staff in how to respond appropriately when Volunteers bring allegations of wrongdoing to their attention. The agency's policy, which dates to early 2009, requires any Peace Corps staff member who receives or has knowledge of a Volunteer allegation to treat the allegation with the utmost discretion and confidentiality, to take appropriate measures to ensure the Volunteer's safety, and to ensure the allegation is given serious consideration including referral to the Inspector General when appropriate.

- We issued Peace Corps' *Commitment to Sexual Assault Victims*, a set of core principles to ensure we provide timely, effective, and compassionate support to victims of sexual assault. The Commitment makes clear that all Volunteers must be treated with dignity and respect, and that no one deserves to be a victim of a sexual assault.

- We implemented new *Guidelines for Responding to Rape and Major Sexual Assault* that detail our victim-centered approach and the specific procedures posts must follow in order to respond promptly to an incident and provide proper support to a victim. We have also trained staff on the new *Guidelines*, which include the *Commitment to Sexual Assault Victims.*

- I tasked the agency's Sexual Assault Working Group with developing a comprehensive sexual assault prevention and response program, and I appointed a

former Peace Corps Country Director with expertise in rape crisis response to lead the Working Group. The Sexual Assault Working Group, which was created in early 2008, includes former Peace Corps Volunteers and survivors of rape and sexual assault, as well as staff with expertise in trauma response. The Sexual Assault Working Group has examined best practices in the field and reached out to experts within and outside of government, including the Department of Defense's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, the Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women, and Speaking Out About Rape (SOAR).

- We signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN), the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization, to collaborate and share resources on sexual assault prevention and response.

- I created a new Victims Advocate position to coordinate victim support services, and hired a nationally recognized leader in victims' rights to serve as the first advocate. The idea for this position was suggested by First Response Action, among others, and I thank them for it. Victims of crime will now be able to turn to a skilled, capable Peace Corps staffer who will make certain they receive the emotional, medical, legal, and other support they need during and after their service.

- At the suggestion of Congressman Poe, who serves on the Committee, I created the Peace Corps Volunteer Sexual Assault Panel, made up of outside experts and former Volunteers who were victims of sexual assault. The individual members of this Panel will assist the Peace Corps in the design and implementation of the agency's sexual assault risk reduction and response strategies. Representatives of the Department of Defense's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, and the Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women and Office for Victims of Crime, have agreed to serve on the Panel.

- Since last year, we have been developing comprehensive new training materials for Volunteers on sexual assault prevention and response. Starting this summer, we will implement new online training, which will be required for Volunteers prior to departing the United States. This will be followed by additional in-country training both before and during their service.

- We have taken steps to improve the medical care we provide Volunteers by giving our medical professionals at headquarters overall responsibility for hiring, credentialing and managing Peace Corps Medical Officers (PCMOs) at every post and by providing enhanced guidance to those PCMOs on how to handle serious medical issues. New Regional Medical Officers were hired to assist in the health care of Volunteers and a Quality Improvement Council was established to monitor and report on ongoing health care issues.

- Based on recommendations made by the Office of Inspector General, we gave the Office of Safety and Security at headquarters greater authority to oversee the agency's global safety and security program.

- We developed standard operating procedures for our overseas Safety and Security Coordinators (SSCs), who are responsible for coordinating the safety and security programs that support Volunteers at each post. We also conducted a highly successful two-week training program in August 2010 that brought together for the first time all of our Safety and Security staff from headquarters and the field, including SSCs.

- We revised notification procedures for serious incidents to ensure key staff is rapidly informed of major crimes against Volunteers.

- I tasked the Deputy Director of the Peace Corps to lead a team that has visited overseas posts to gather Volunteer input on safety concerns and evaluate the effectiveness of the agency's efforts to prevent crimes against Volunteers and support victims of crime.

- We put in place new policies to better reflect our commitment to the families of fallen Volunteers. We formalized the agency's existing practice of sending a Peace Corps staff member to be with the family of a fallen Volunteer within 24 hours of the notification of the death of the Volunteer, unless the family requests otherwise. This staff member will serve as the primary liaison to the family. We also standardized procedures for returning possessions of fallen Volunteers to their families by requiring that all personal effects of a fallen Volunteer be personally delivered by Peace Corps staff to the family, unless requested otherwise.

These reforms complement the work we are doing to implement our June 2010 Comprehensive Agency Assessment. As directed by Congress, the Peace Corps conducted a thorough assessment and submitted a report to Congress last year that clearly articulates the agency's strategic vision for, among other things, Volunteer placement, Volunteer and staff training, Volunteer programming, medical care of Volunteers, and agency recruitment efforts. The Assessment is a strategic roadmap for major agency decisions, and we are working to implement its recommendations.

Effective Training and Support

The reforms of the past two years build on the extensive information, training and support we already provide to our Volunteers. The process of educating prospective Volunteers about health and safety issues begins long before they step off the plane. The Peace Corps remains committed to transparency, and we are completely open about the extent of crimes committed against Volunteers. We publish an annual *Report of Volunteer Safety* that includes detailed data regarding crimes against Volunteers,

including rapes and sexual assaults, as well as trends for the past 10 years. Reports from the last five years are posted on the Peace Corps website.

When we invite applicants to serve, we provide them with country-specific information on health, safety, and security, and crime data to help them make an informed decision about whether Peace Corps service is right for them. After they accept the invitation, we give Volunteers an average of 10 weeks of in-country training before they begin their service, plus additional training throughout their 27-month commitment. This training covers technical, cross-cultural, health, and safety and security issues. In addition, the Peace Corps provides instruction in 250 languages to our Volunteers serving in some 77 countries around the world. We also provide Volunteers with a monthly living allowance and comprehensive medical coverage throughout their service.

Every Peace Corps post has a Peace Corps office and staff managed by a Country Director. The country staff includes the Safety and Security Coordinator, one or more medical professionals, and program managers and trainers. The country staff is responsible for, among other things, evaluating and selecting Volunteers' work and housing sites. In selecting sites for our Volunteers to live, we carefully consider factors such as access to medical care, proximity to other Volunteers, availability of communications and transportation, crime rates, and the potential for obtaining and maintaining the support of local authorities and the community at large.

All posts receive regional and global support in health and safety operations. The Office of Safety and Security at headquarters oversees all Peace Corps security programs, both domestically and overseas. The office has more than two dozen staffers, including ten Peace Corps Safety and Security Officers who are based in regions around the world and who provide technical expertise, guidance, and training to Peace Corps posts. This office is headed by a security professional who has 27 years of experience in security and law enforcement, both in the United States and overseas.

In the event of an emergency, we immediately work with our leadership team in country to assess the situation and implement an effective solution; in the case of a medical emergency, the solution may entail local hospitalization or a medical evacuation to a regional site or back to the United States. Each post also has a country-specific emergency action plan, tested on an annual basis, which instructs Volunteers on how to respond to events such as natural disasters or civil unrest.

Support for Victims of Sexual Assault

The Peace Corps, as an agency and as a family, is committed to providing the highest quality support and service to Volunteers who have been the victims of sexual violence or other crimes. From the moment a Volunteer first reports a rape or sexual assault we must be ready, willing, and able to provide compassionate and effective support and assistance. That is my commitment, and I believe that we have, as an agency, taken enormous strides

in the past few years toward making it a reality, thanks in part to the productive conversations we have had with the broader Peace Corps community and outside experts.

As part of the Peace Corps' victim-centered approach we have put in place systems to allow victims to report rapes and obtain prompt, compassionate assistance without fear of being judged. Dedicated specialists from the medical, mental health, security, and legal fields are available from Peace Corps headquarters to help Volunteers, as needed, with the response and recovery process.

The Peace Corps' Counseling and Outreach Unit at headquarters is key to our victim-centered approach to responding to an emergency. Mental health counselors are available to all Volunteers for any of their needs, ranging from routine check-ins to coping with major traumatic events. The Counseling and Outreach Unit is trained to deal with emergencies and offers support to both victims and their families. The unit trains Peace Corps medical staff at posts to provide initial emotional support services to all Volunteers, including victims of sexual assault. Should a Volunteer need specialized care that is beyond the expertise of Peace Corps medical staff, the Peace Corps will provide access to medical professionals who can effectively support the Volunteer's needs. The Peace Corps Counseling and Outreach Unit also maintains a 24-hour hotline for families to get more information about natural disasters, like tsunamis and earthquakes, or other emergencies.

In addition to providing support to victims, the Peace Corps makes every effort to protect Volunteers from sexual violence. Both staff and Volunteers participate in regular training on safety and security. This training covers a variety of topics related to sexual assault, and other risks that Volunteers may face while serving. The Peace Corps has a reporting system to track and analyze safety and security incidents and the data collected is used to instruct our operations and improve Volunteer and staff security.

When an assault occurs, we work with our partners in host countries to bring perpetrators to justice. In 2009 and 2010, arrests were made in 65 percent of the rape, attempted rape and major sexual assault cases in which the victim elected to file a report with local police.

Honoring the Service of Volunteers

Before completing my testimony, I would like to take a moment to honor the more than 8,600 Americans, ranging in age from 21 to 86, and from all 50 states, who are currently serving as Peace Corps Volunteers. We deeply appreciate the willingness of these dedicated Americans to leave the comforts of home to serve our country in some of the least developed and most remote areas of the world. The work is often challenging, and the pay is minimal, but these committed, patriotic Americans perform heroically, whether they are teaching English, promoting business development or working to improve sanitation and health. In the words of President Reagan, "Nowhere has the proud American tradition of voluntarism been better illustrated than through the Peace Corps."

Volunteers personify hope, in a way that speaks to the core of the American character. All Volunteers share an enduring devotion to service, and an acute awareness of the challenges and opportunities in our world. These are exactly the skills our country needs to lead in these times.

Volunteers target some of the most debilitating diseases around the world. For example, they play a key role in our country's global response to HIV/AIDS, promoting behavior change and sustainable, culturally appropriate solutions to the pandemic. By mobilizing isolated communities and helping orphans and vulnerable children, Volunteers turn hope into action. And, through education about malaria and the distribution of mosquito nets, Volunteers combat a leading cause of death and disease in many developing countries. In all their work, Volunteers represent our country's highest values and ideals.

Peace Corps Volunteers serve as America's most effective grassroots ambassadors. In doing so, they help to dispel misperceptions about the United States and to counter anti-American sentiment in areas of the world that may have little direct exposure to Americans. That is one reason why, throughout its history, across different Congresses and administrations, the Peace Corps has received strong bipartisan support for its important mission, including from this Committee. And, in turn, our Volunteers receive tremendous support from the communities in which they serve. The Peace Corps only operates in countries where we are invited and those countries are deeply grateful for the work we do. In fact, the Peace Corps receives millions of dollars annually in cash and in-kind contributions from the countries in which we serve – some of the poorest countries in the world.

Volunteers' service to our country continues long after they have left the Peace Corps. As President Obama has said, "Returned volunteers, enriched by their experiences overseas, bring a deeper understanding of other cultures and traditions back to their home communities in the United States." Many former Volunteers use their training and experience to become leaders in society, in areas ranging from private industry to development work, and from community service to Congress. The skills they acquire while serving -- whether fluency in a foreign language, complex problem-solving, familiarity with a foreign culture or expertise in agricultural practices -- are invaluable to the United States, as is the sense of service that the Peace Corps promotes. Ultimately, the investment that we make in our Volunteers is re-paid many times over, at home and abroad.

I am deeply grateful to our Volunteers for their dedication and service, and I am committed to doing all I can as Director of the Peace Corps to protect and support them. I know that the members of the Committee share this goal and I look forward to working with you and others to ensure the continued success of this agency and its Volunteers.

Thank you.

# # #

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Williams. We thank you for your service.

Although it is not a perfect comparison, much has changed on college campuses in the past 20 years in the way that administrators, faculties, students, and all of the staff respond to victims of sexual abuse, and it has improved for the better in the past 20 years.

When I went to college, you did not know where to go for help, how to report it, or get any kind of help. A lot has changed. Mistakes and crimes do occur, but they are treated in a far more serious vein than before, not a perfect comparison but as it relates to the Peace Corps.

I was just jotting down what we have heard from the victims, and the common denominator is to change the focus from a culture of blaming the victim to not blaming the victim. So, I am curious to hear about how you are shifting, not you as a person, but the culture of the Peace Corps, and the folks that you have in-country to shift their focus from blaming the victim and trying to downgrade the crime—and it is a crime—to be more supportive in helping the victim to report the crime, making it easier to report the crime, and not blaming the victim.

Some of the notes that I was taking down, training for in-country personnel on how to respond to sexual assault survivors, the doctors that you have in-country, that they need training in post-rape exams so that they get the evidence they need in order to present the case in court, meeting advocates in DC and throughout and different cities of people who understand what the survivors are going through, Workers' Compensation deadlines—to eliminate that deadline, Peace Corps should facilitate interaction among assault victims, instead of trying to separate them or downplay the crime that has been perpetrated against them—having whistleblower and training procedures in place. Also, many of the survivors shared with us, either verbally or in their written statement, and talked a lot about the training video that is still being played and whether that is adequate, that really focuses on the problem, or whether it is blaming the victim and trying to make it sound like they might be the ones responsible for the crime.

Also, reporting and making that reporting public, which has been a very important part of the college campus change in their culture, is mandating through legislation that they have to report the crimes that are committed on campus. Where are those unsafe places? Is the Peace Corps reevaluating where volunteers are placed? Also the Annual Volunteer Surveys, if that is shared with others so that we know where the sexual assaults are taking place.

So, I would just share those with you and perhaps you could discuss how blaming the victim, more than anything else, is changing in the Peace Corps and the country selection, whether we are making sure that we have evacuation procedures in place to get those victims out of harm's way.

So, let me ask you the following questions. The Peace Corps is subject to the 5-year employment rule, which statutorily restricts the tenure of U.S. direct hires, including regional directors, county desks, country desk officers, et cetera. The GAO noted, "One factor

that may contribute to the Peace Corps' difficulty in implementing its safety and security policies is turnover among key managers."

Do you think that this 5-year rule makes it more difficult for the Peace Corps to protect its volunteers? Would you support legislation eliminating this 5-year rule?

Mr. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Regarding the 5-year rule, it was put in place, of course, by the legendary Sargent Shriver when he was Director of the Peace Corps in order to make sure the Peace Corps had a continual flow of fresh blood, returned volunteers from the field to help design and continue to implement Peace Corps' programs worldwide.

I think that there is always a need for fresh blood in any organization, especially I think in terms of an agency that focuses on young people around the world volunteering, but at the same time I am more than willing to entertain and discuss with you and other members of the committee the aspects of the 5-year rule that might have a direct bearing on our safety and security.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much.

In response to the survivors' testimony, the agency's frequently asked questions brochure and safety and volunteer support brochure assert that, "Volunteers who are victims of sexual assault can expect to receive extensive support as it relates to their safety, medical, and psychological care, legal options, and continued service with the Peace Corps."

However, the testimony presented to this committee and testimony that I have gotten since we have posted this hearing indicated that volunteers in general are inadequately trained on sexual assault issues or often placed in dangerous situations, that the agency's in-country response frequently fails to meet the survivors' needs, that upon return to the U.S., volunteers often receive hostile, rather than supportive, treatment and that institutional obstacles often prevent survivors from receiving long-term medical and mental health care.

How do you explain the significant discrepancy between what the brochures say, what the video says, and what has been presented before us?

Mr. WILLIAMS. Madam Chairman, there is no doubt that what these courageous women have done has opened our eyes to a problem that we need to correct. And we need to correct it now. And I want to work with you to do that.

Let me just mention one thing about the video. I am going to replace the video immediately because I have listened very carefully to the victims and their view of the video. We have been over the past few months designing a new revamped training program, which will include also pre-service training. And so we are going to have state-of-the-art.

One of the important things that we are doing right now is the fact that we are going to be listening and working closely with RAINN. RAINN is, as you know, a preeminent organization. They are going to guide us.

I was listening very carefully to the RAINN representative's testimony this morning. I think that she has provided a road map, if you will, of things that we need to follow as we move forward to revamp and reform the Peace Corps.

So rest assured that this type of thing of blaming the victim will not continue in the Peace Corps today.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. I thank you so much for your attitude, I am very confident that those changes will take place. Thank you, Mr. Williams.

Mr. Berman?

Mr. BERMAN. Well, thank you much, Madam Chairman.

I would like to continue down the line that the chairman started in terms of some of the specific suggestions. When one reads the e-mail or not reads because I didn't but listened to the show and heard Mrs. Puzey talk about the e-mail from her daughter to the country director, I reached a conclusion that unless there is something I don't know, such a high level of recklessness to allow the perpetrator's brother to somehow have access to it is almost beyond comprehension because that was a sophisticated e-mail that warned of the dangers. It laid out a road map of what should not happen. And it seems to have been ignored unless, again, there are facts I don't know.

Whistleblower protection in that case I think means two things: One, as a general principle, no retaliation against the victims who are filing complaints regarding what happened; but, secondly, the issue of confidentiality. And is that something that through practices or legislation you could support?

Mr. WILLIAMS. Well, thank you, Congressman Berman. Without a doubt, we would be open to looking at legislation that could strengthen the Peace Corps in terms of providing enhanced safety and security for our volunteers, no doubt about it. I am prepared to sit down with any member of this committee or anyone in the Congress and discuss this.

We have already been engaged in conversations regarding whistleblower protection with Senator Isakson.

Mr. BERMAN. You are open, then, to a——

Mr. WILLIAMS. Yes.

Mr. BERMAN [continuing]. Legislative approach to deal with the institutionalization of the reforms that you are embarking upon?

Mr. WILLIAMS. Yes, sir, I am, because, referring back to the question from Madam Chairman, the 5-year rule is an issue, obviously, that we need to take a look at. And so to the extent that we could codify these important best practice policies and best practices is no doubt something we need to give serious consideration to, working in conjunction with the Congress.

Mr. BERMAN. A second issue. This issue of the role of the Peace Corps with the victim who is separated from the Peace Corps in terms of very specifically the Workers' Comp situation, there are issues of ongoing medical attention, counseling, other benefits under the law, going through that is not such an easy process in terms of the forms and the procedures for utilizing the Workers' Comp system to get compensation for those costs.

I was led to believe from the testimony the Peace Corps sort of eliminates its involvement once the volunteer has separated. Why does that have to be?

Mr. WILLIAMS. Congressman, I think you are absolutely right. We need to take a serious look at that in terms of our ongoing support for members of the Peace Corps family because just because

a volunteer has been separated from official service doesn't mean that there is not an ongoing need for care and support. And I want to work out an arrangement whereby we can do that.

One of the things that I have asked my victims' advocate in her new position to do is to sit down with me and the Department of Labor to see how we can coordinate to provide better support to volunteers so they won't have to navigate the bureaucracy on their own. I think they deserve that. And I am prepared to look into how we can do that in a very effective and efficient way.

Mr. BERMAN. Another suggestion I heard coming from the testimony was while what you have done in terms of the advocate in Washington is a very important first step, at least until the training has so taken hold that each country team can provide those services on their own, isn't there logic in having some group of roving advocates who can go on site and make sure that the best practices are, in fact, being implemented?

Mr. WILLIAMS. I think that is a good management practice across the board in many of our operations. And certainly I want to entertain that and determine how we can best move forward. I think it is an excellent idea.

Mr. BERMAN. Thank you very much. And I do appreciate your openness to legislation because I do think a pretty compelling case has been made that it is important for us to institutionalize this. And obviously we want to get your reactions as we go along to the workability of what we are talking about.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Thank you very much because we want to cooperate to the extent we can with the members of this committee. Thank you.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much.

Judge Poe?

Mr. POE. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Williams, good to see you again. Thank you for coming by and letting us vet this issue and your response. And I believe in about 6–8 weeks we are going to meet again on some of the things we talked about earlier.

I look at this issue as a human rights issue. You know, America, we are the human rights country. We go throughout the world promoting human rights in a whole bunch of ways. I think it is important, though, we return and focus on the human rights of Americans that go abroad in the Peace Corps.

And thank you for your service in the Peace Corps. It is a great organization. I don't want to see it disappear. I think we ought to encourage it, make it better.

I see this issue as kind of several parts. First, when a crime is committed, we have the victim. And then we have the Peace Corps response, which is what we are going to work on legislatively, I hope.

But also the Peace Corps response must I think include two other avenues that haven't been talked about today. And that is that Peace Corps' interaction with the country that the victim was in and what is their response, how are they going to deal with this crime committed in their country.

And, lastly, the perpetrator. There is a criminal involved in these criminal actions. And how do we see our interaction with some for-

eign country going after the outlaw that committed this crime? And so those are the things that we need to work on.

We don't have time to verbalize those now. But I would hope as we proceed with legislation, with your help, with RAINN, and all of the victims that are here, that we can figure out a way to make the country that we are trying to help, these angels are helping, be responsive to the crime that was committed in their country as well.

And I will just hear some short comments from you on that issue if you care to make them.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Congressman Poe. And thank you also for the care and concern that you have for the Peace Corps. You supported the Peace Corps. And I have appreciated our conversations. We will follow up, as you say, in a few weeks to continue that.

Regarding care of victim, this is going to be first and foremost in our response. We are going to make sure that it is a victim-centered approach. We are going to be compassionate. All of our medical personnel have been trained in how to work with victims of sexual assault. There is nothing more important.

It is not just going to be at the country or the post. It is going to be a continuum when they return back to the United States, either to their home of record or if they are in Washington. And it is a team effort. We are all going to make sure, all of our staff, our senior management, is focused on this. We are committed to making this, changing the culture that these courageous people have encountered in the past. We are going to change that.

Regarding the host country, the host countries around the world, as you know so well, want the Peace Corps to stay there. And so we find in working with the country team, with the Ambassador, with the regional security officer, each of the Embassies, that the cooperation we get from local law enforcement has been very good. They are very interested in finding the perpetrator, the criminal who attacked a Peace Corps volunteer, no matter what the type of attack is. And we have seen a lot of good cooperation from them working with our local safety and security coordinator in each of our countries. And that will continue to be the case. And we will do everything we can to pursue that.

But, again, it is also something that the Ambassador in our country, U.S. Ambassador, also has been very, very—in just about every country we can think of where we have had issues, they have been determined and have been a willing ally in this fight, sir.

Mr. POE. I am going to yield back the remainder of my time, Madam Chair.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Payne?

Mr. PAYNE. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, for calling this very important hearing. And let me welcome you, Mr. Director Williams. It is good to see you again. I appreciate it. At the meeting we had early on, when you took over the responsibilities as the head of the Peace Corps, as I have indicated, I think it is one of the greatest organizations that the U.S. back in the early '60s created. And I think they really do an outstanding job.

And I think that this year, rather than having this kind of hearing, unfortunately, we should be really celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Peace Corps. And hopefully we can really come up with the corrective work that we can deal with the problems and once again highlight the great achieves that the Peace Corps has made.

I visit many developing countries. And one of the first things they ask if you don't have a Peace Corps is, "Can you send in the Peace Corps?" And the U.S. Ambassadors and the heads of countries, many of them, as a matter of fact, many of the leaders of countries today, had experience with the Peace Corps. They even learn English at a Peace Corps school. And they really want the Peace Corps there.

So I know that the problem is not with the host countries but there has to be better coordination between the host country and the Peace Corps. As I mentioned before, I have been to the graduation ceremonies after new Peace Corps members come, usually a whole group, those who determine they are staying. And usually, you know, 98 percent of them go through the training. They have their celebration and their graduation. I have spoken at a number of those in sub-Saharan Africa in particular. So I have a very strong feel for the Peace Corps and what you have done.

I wondered this, number one, if in certain countries sexual assault is more prominent in other countries, as we know. They are all different. Is there any special kind of precautions or inculcation with the volunteers to assess them of the fact that culturally in some places sexual assault has not been prosecuted by that country? Does that come into play? And do you do anything special in those areas?

Mr. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Congressman Payne. And thank you, sir, for your historic support of the Peace Corps. I know you take every opportunity to visit our volunteers and to learn what they are doing.

I think that we have had very good success in host countries in finding the perpetrators of these crimes and in prosecuting them because, again, this is crucial to them because, as you know ,they want the Peace Corps to remain in their country. And so when there is a crime committed against a volunteer, we have had very good cooperation from local authorities.

And the other thing is that we make sure that when a victim has made a decision to pursue this with local authorities, that the victim is accompanied and supported by the Peace Corps every step of the way, but we have seen good support from local authorities, sir.

Mr. PAYNE. Thank you.

Now I know you have a $26 million budget cut coming up in this fiscal budget. And the programs that you are trying to put in, is there any way you can preserve the work in protecting some of these new initiatives that we are trying, in spite of the cuts that you are going to evidently receive? Could you ensure that you still work on these issues that have been raised here today?

Mr. WILLIAMS. I am committed to making sure that whatever resources are provided by the Congress, whatever level of budget we have, we are not going to compromise on the health, the safety, and

security of our volunteers. We might not be able to go into a new country, might not have as many volunteers come, expanding in certain countries, but what is first and foremost for us is the health, safety, and security of our volunteers. We are going to use every dime we have to make sure we support that.

Mr. PAYNE. Just finally, as you know, as we have talked about the death of our volunteer Cathy, it certainly concerns us all. And, now, we are waiting for the final report of her investigation.

We have great concern for the safety of Peace Corps volunteers who report violations of other Peace Corps workers. Can you lay out what protections are in place to ensure that volunteers are protected so that we don't have a similar situation occur?

Mr. WILLIAMS. Yes, sir. Thank you.

We want to be sure that we protect the confidentiality of any information that any volunteer provides to our staff. So we have trained overseas staff in how to respond appropriately when volunteers bring allegations of wrongdoing to their attention.

This policy, which dates to early 2009, requires any staff member who receives or has knowledge of a volunteer's allegation to treat the allegation with the utmost discretion and confidentiality, to take appropriate measures to ensure the volunteer's safety, and to ensure that the allegation is given serious consideration, including referring to our Inspector General.

That is our policy. And, more than the policy, that is the way we are implementing this. And we are going to provide oversight.

And I travel. I have traveled to 10 countries in the past 1½ years since I have been Peace Corps Director. And my senior staff travels extensively. These are the kinds of questions and concerns that we express and look into deeply when we do that. So not only do we have a policy. We are going to implement the policy. We are going to follow up and provide oversight.

Thank you.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you.

Ms. Buerkle?

Ms. BUERKLE. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Mr. Williams, for being here this morning and giving us this opportunity to question and also for your willingness to sit through the very difficult testimonies we heard earlier.

I have several questions. I would like to begin by both the Bush administration and the Obama administration have encouraged and talked about doubling the number of Peace Corps volunteers. Do you think that given what has gone on and what doesn't seem to be under control at this point, that that would be a prudent objective for the Peace Corps?

Mr. WILLIAMS. I think that right now we are in 77 countries, Congresswoman. And that is a very effective footprint worldwide. I believe that we could grow and still manage our responsibilities in a very sound way because we are going to make the reforms, we are going to implement those reforms. And we are going to get the best possible expertise that we can bring to bear to help us manage this as we go forward. So I am confident that we could continue to grow, but all of this, of course, is going to be dependent upon our budget.

Ms. BUERKLE. In your testimony, you talked about training for the volunteers. And that has not been implemented yet. When do you expect that that will be implemented?

Mr. WILLIAMS. We are in the final stages of finalizing the new training. We are going to start rolling it out this summer. So, you know, in a couple of months, we will roll it out.

And also we want to listen very carefully to our colleagues at RAINN as we move forward with this training because it is important to train, first of all, our staff, but also just as important the volunteers so that we have an effective dialogue between staff and volunteers as we move forward.

Ms. BUERKLE. If you would, could you please let us know when that begins to get rolled out and keep us informed as to the progress of that?

Mr. WILLIAMS. I certainly will. I will be happy to do that. Thank you for the question.

Ms. BUERKLE. We heard testimony this morning and specifically in the instance of Kate. She was in an area, a remote area, that didn't have Internet or phones. How will you address that going forward so that these volunteers have a safety net, that they can have some means of communicating any danger that they might feet?

Mr. WILLIAMS. One of the things that is our goal when we place any volunteer in a site is to make sure they are placed in a community setting where, in fact, they are not going to be alone, per se. They have counterparts that they see every day, whether they are health care workers or teachers. There are host families. We work with local law enforcement. We take careful attention. We pay careful attention to site selection. There is supervision by our staff and headquarters.

Also, we listen very carefully to the volunteers. There is something we have in Peace Corps which we didn't have when I was a volunteer, which I think is a wonderful new arrangement. That is something called a Volunteer Advisory Committee. And they provide a lot of information and oversight in many ways to staff. I listen to them very carefully. I meet with them when I travel. And so we spend a lot of time thinking about site selection.

At the same time, if a volunteer feels unsafe, if he or she feels that this is not a safe setting, I want my staff to take immediate action to look for other places for the volunteer to work because we have other sites. In all the countries where we work, there is no need for one of our volunteers to feel unsafe in a situation. We have to listen to the volunteers.

Ms. BUERKLE. And so can you tell us what changes have been made? Because we heard from a panel this morning that when they expressed their concerns to their superiors, they were ignored.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Well, I think, first of all, we have established a policy of listening to volunteers. I have asked the regional managers for Africa, Asia, Latin America to carry out these policies to make sure we provide oversight.

I listened to—the Volunteer Advisory Committees are a very important source of information because they represent the volunteers. They are elected by the volunteers. And they are not shy about providing me with e-mails and calls to tell me about things

that they believe need to be changed. So we are going to listen to the volunteers. And I am going to make sure as a practice that if a volunteer feels unsafe, we have to take action.

Ms. BUERKLE. And so the whistleblowers' provisions and concerns, that makes that even more important that time is of the essence so that we can protect whistleblowers and protect those who are willing to call your attention to some situation and not fear retaliation.

The last piece is we see on the map over here—and we have been provided with those maps—that there are areas that are even more unsafe than others. Those areas, will there be enhanced safety procedures or will it be applied uniformly across the board, regardless of the location?

Mr. WILLIAMS. One of the things that is important is that we do not intend to put volunteers in unsafe countries. Many countries want Peace Corps to enter their countries. But before we do that, we have to make sure we have a permissive environment.

We work with the Ambassador in those countries. We work with the regional security officers. We conduct a full country assessment before we agree to move into any country. And if a country is deemed to be unsafe at any level, we are not going to place volunteers there.

Ms. BUERKLE. Thank you. I look forward to working with you. This legislation couldn't be more important. And I think time is of the essence. So thank you very much for being here this morning.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Thank you. And I look forward to working with you and your staff also.

Ms. BUERKLE. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Ms. Buerkle.

Mr. Smith?

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. And, again, thank you for calling this extraordinarily timely hearing because I think it will get results. Sometimes hearings come and go and they pass and nobody pays attention. This one will. So thank you.

Let me just ask you, Mr. Williams. You said that there was good cooperation with local authorities when there is an allegation made. You mentioned that these countries are "very interested" in tracking down the perpetrator. Could you define exactly what that means? For example, how many arrests have occurred? How many convictions have occurred as a result of rapes of Peace Corps volunteers? What, if anything, was required of our Peace Corps volunteer as that court case went forward? And I mean be very, very specific.

One of the things we have learned with trafficking is that countries will talk a good game and then be very deficient in doing anything to mitigate sex trafficking. And it is often the police. It is often the judiciary, untrained judges, and, really, a culture of impunity. So if you could answer that one?

Secondly, today if a woman does report a concern over her safety, I mean, today, right now, what absolutely happens in that case? Is she redeployed? Is there an assessment done as to the validity of her concerns? Is she in any way penalized for coming forward and causing some aggravation on the part of somebody higher up in the chain of command? Is there an immediate redeployment? And is

there, another question, an assessment of places where these instances have occurred? Do you keep in track?

For example, Bangladesh, in one particular locale, there may have been five attacks. Do we have any idea in terms of tracking whether or not there has been a pattern in any particular area? And once an allegation has been made and it seems to me that there would be no credible reason why an allegation wouldn't be given full faith that that woman is concerned about something about to or that actually happened. Is that area then put on a do not send or deploy a Peace Corps volunteer to that area so that there is a zero tolerance when it comes to that particular area?

And, finally, in 2010, the agency's Inspector General found that between Peace Corps and State Department, there was an unclear responsibility that could "compromise volunteers' safety and hinder response to crimes against volunteers."

The IG recommended that the Peace Corps develop formal documentation with the Department of State's Bureau of Diplomatic Security to clarify the roles and responsibilities for overseas safety and security regarding Peace Corps staff and Peace Corps volunteers.

To date, the Peace Corps and State Department lack a memorandum of understanding establishing the agencies' respective responsibilities to volunteers. Will that happen immediately? And why hasn't it happened to date?

Mr. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Congressman. And thank you for your support of the Peace Corps. I know you have been a strong supporter of the Peace Corps.

Let me answer your first question regarding the pursuit of the criminals. We have been very successful, we believe, in working with our partners in host countries to bring perpetrators to justice. In 2009 and 2010, arrests were made in 61 percent of the rape and attempted rape cases in which the victim elected to file a report with local police. And so we see strong support.

The other thing, these cases are high-profile cases in small, developing countries, as you well know. Our Ambassadors are determined to pursue justice for our volunteers. And so we believe we have gotten good cooperation, and we continue to pursue this.

Mr. SMITH. Could I ask you on that point, from the 61 arrests, 61 percent of the arrests, could you maybe break down for the record exactly how many that turns out to be and whether or not they were convicted and whether or not they served time in prison?

Mr. WILLIAMS. I don't have those stats with me, but I will get them for you and submit them for the record. And I will be happy to do that.

Mr. SMITH. Because the arrests could be done to placate us.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Of course.

Mr. SMITH. And then the real meting out of justice then goes undone.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Very fair point.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Your point about the MOU with the Department of State——

Mr. SMITH. Yes?

Mr. WILLIAMS [continuing]. We are currently in discussions with the Department of State about the clarification of responsibilities per the IG's recommendation. We hope to have a resolution of that very soon.

Mr. SMITH. Yes.

Mr. WILLIAMS. That is way overdue.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

Mr. WILLIAMS. We need to get it done. And my colleagues at the State Department stand ready to do that.

Mr. SMITH. Does your office work with and do you have anybody that works with on a regular basis the TIP Office? I know that you work with the Interagency Council, but is there a regular dialogue with, for example, Ambassador Luis CdeBaca because, again, there are many instances where, countries where, especially Peace Corps women volunteers are being deployed, where they happen to be a Tier 3 country and a country on the watch list that could be Tier 3 soon? I'm out of time, but if you could just—do you work with the TIP Office?

Mr. WILLIAMS. I don't know to what extent we have frequent conversations with the TIP Office, but we, of course, work very closely with Diplomatic Security. But this is an excellent idea. I will talk to our safety and security people to make sure we step that up.

Thank you, sir.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Smith. And thank you, Mr. Williams. We will look forward. Our committee looks forward to working with you; with RAINN; with victims and survivors of sexual assault; with Peace Corps volunteers, former and current, who are undergoing difficulties in drafting legislation that will improve their reporting of crime and improve your ability to respond to what is a serious crime and change the culture to a victimless and not a blame the victim mentality but blame the perpetrator and the person who is causing the crime and not the victim.

So thank you, Mr. Williams. We appreciate it.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Madam Chairman. Thank you and the members of the committee for support of the Peace Corps and for looking for ways to help make the Peace Corps stronger as we move forward to another 50 years.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Absolutely.

Mr. WILLIAMS. I sincerely appreciate that.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you.

And, finally, I would like to introduce Kathy Buller, Inspector General of the Peace Corps. Ms. Buller was named by the Director to be Inspector General of the Peace Corps on May 25, 2008 with over 20 years experience in the Inspector General community.

As a member of the Council of Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, Ms. Buller is also co-chair of the Inspections and Evaluations Committee and a member of the Legislation Committee.

Thank you, Ms. Buller, for appearing before us today. Your full statement will be made a part of the record and we ask that you summarize it in 5 minutes.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you and welcome.

Ms. BULLER. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF MS. KATHY A. BULLER, INSPECTOR GENERAL, PEACE CORPS

Ms. BULLER. Madam Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Berman, and distinguished members of the committee, I thank you for inviting me to appear before you and allowing me to summarize my prepared statement.

I would also like to acknowledge the courage and the strength that the returned Peace Corps volunteers and the Puzey family demonstrated today when they testified before this committee.

As the Inspector General of the Peace Corps, I am charged with independent oversight of the agency. I began my tenure as IG in 2008. And since then my office has reviewed key safety and security functions at headquarters and our post-audits and in our program evaluations.

We have issued many recommendations for improvement. While the agency has made strides to improve its safety and security program, several problems continue to surface. We continue to report a lack of management oversight and inconsistencies in safety and security staff qualifications and training.

Peace Corps is a highly decentralized agency with headquarters staff primarily relying on country directors and their staff to run the programs in the field. This model is only successful when there are clear lines of communication, well-established policies and procedures, and adequate oversight functions at headquarters.

The Peace Corps Office of Safety and Security was created in response to the 2002 GAO report to "foster improved communication, coordination, oversight, and accountability for all Peace Corps safety and security efforts." However, posts are not accountable to the Office of Safety and Security. Instead, regional offices provide guidance to country directors. And these offices are responsible for monitoring compliance, which results in uneven implementation of policies and procedures across posts.

Peace Corps must ensure that safety and security managers at headquarters have the authority to ensure safety and security functions at the post are carried out. The Safety and Security Office must function as the office it was intended to be, rather than merely a consultative office for overseas posts.

Peace Corps' approach to safety and security is built on the acceptance model. Fundamental tenets of this model include building relationships, sharing information, training, site development, incident reporting and response, emergency communication and planning.

Our 2010 audit of safety and security indicated that Peace Corps overseas safety and security staff are not consistently qualified to support volunteers in achieving the goals of this acceptance model.

Volunteers serve in 77 countries. And I acknowledge that what might be required in one country may not be applicable in another. But there should be a baseline of what is acceptable and the agency management needs to hold all posts accountable to this standard.

In security situations, such as violent crimes, kidnappings, and acts of terrorism, every second is vital. And strong coordination between Peace Corps and the Department of State is essential. There needs to be a memorandum of understanding that would define

each agency's role and responsibilities in specified volunteer safety and security situations. I have recommended that the agency formalize an MOU with the Department of State on safety and security-related issues. This MOU is a critical step in improving the agency's capacity to effectively respond to security situations.

Volunteer safety and security is also compromised by the agency's failure to implement OIG recommendations. Since 2004, OIG has found that 44 percent of posts audited were not in compliance with the requirement to obtain a background check of post staff. After the policy was revised in September 2009, to include short-term contractors, OIG found that 73 percent of posts audited were not compliant.

We identified the timely and effective remediation of OIG recommendations as a management challenge in the agency's 2011 performance accountability report. Also, the agency left the chief compliance officer position vacant for 1 year and 7 months.

Since the new chief compliance officer arrived, more than 300 recommendations have been closed. However, as of today, 205 recommendations remain open, some dating back to early 2008. For example, in our 2008 evaluation of volunteer safety and security, there are still open recommendations about training for volunteers and staff, volunteer housing standards, emergency preparedness, and crime reporting.

Peace Corps has made progress in addressing the agency's safety and security issues since GAO issued its concerns in 2002. My office will continue to assist the agency in improving the safety and security of volunteers. We have commenced a review of the agency's implementation of guidelines and protocols related to volunteer victims of sexual assault and also plan to follow up on our previous work. We would also like to express our gratitude to the survivors for their cooperation as we conduct our review.

I believe that, as Peace Corps celebrates its 50th anniversary, the agency has the opportunity to renew its dedication to volunteer safety and security and ensure the sustainability of the agency's mission for another 50 years.

Thank you for this opportunity. And I am prepared to answer any questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Buller follows:]

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MAY 11, 2011 9:30AM – PEACE CORPS AT 50

TESTIMONY OF KATHY A. BULLER

PEACE CORPS INSPECTOR GENERAL

Madam Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Berman, and distinguished members of the Committee I thank you for inviting me to appear before you today. My testimony will outline the Peace Corps Office of Inspector General's (OIG) role in providing oversight of the Peace Corps, particularly its safety and security function. I will highlight the relevant work we have done and give my perspective on the status of safety and security initiatives at the Peace Corps. I hope my testimony will shed light on this important topic for the Peace Corps.

The Peace Corps OIG was established in 1989 after Congress amended the Inspector General Act of 1978 to include smaller agencies. I became the Inspector General (IG) on May 25th, 2008. In my role as the IG, I direct a small office of 20 employees composed of auditors, evaluators, criminal investigators, legal counsel and support staff. I am fortunate to work with individuals who have a broad range of skills and experiences, including seven returned Peace Corps volunteers, and three former General Accountability Office (GAO) employees. All of them have extensive private and public sector experiences. Last year our criminal investigators were granted full statutory law enforcement powers by the Attorney General including the authority to seek and execute search and arrest warrants, seize evidence, make arrests without a warrant while engaged in official duties, and carry firearms.

Our mission is to prevent and detect fraud, waste, abuse, and other wrongdoing in agency operations and programs as well as promote economy, efficiency and effectiveness. My office serves as an independent oversight entity and my duty is to keep Congress and the Director fully and currently informed about problems within the Peace Corps and the need for corrective action. When my auditors and evaluators visit posts, our scope of work and methodology always include a focus on volunteer safety and security.

My testimony explains how my office has integrated a focus on volunteer safety and security as part of our regular evaluations and audits of Peace Corps posts, and summarizes two major work products we conducted since 2008 to assess the effectiveness of the Peace Corps' overall safety and security program. My testimony concludes with the status of the agency's progress to reform its safety and security program. However, it is important to understand the nature of Peace Corps safety and security challenges.

Peace Corps' Safety and Security Challenges

The Peace Corps, like other international development agencies, is constantly mitigating safety and security risks. With volunteers serving in 77 countries, the agency faces a range of challenges that affect volunteer safety and security including: political unrest, natural disasters, rising crime rates, terrorism threats, and the complexity of dealing with varying legal systems in foreign jurisdictions. Unlike most other international agencies, however, the Peace Corps also faces unique safety and security challenges that result from the fact that the majority of volunteers serve at the grass roots level in rural communities, often in remote areas far from the capital city and the Peace Corps office. They live and work with people of diverse cultural backgrounds and languages. In short, the model of volunteerism that makes Peace Corps such a compelling experience for its volunteers can at the same time make the agency's efforts to ensure their safety a challenge.

Peace Corps' approach to safety and security is an 'acceptance model' that requires volunteers to integrate into their community so that local populations, including their host families, friends and local counterparts support and protect them. To make the acceptance model work, the Peace Corps must have a sound process for developing appropriate sites to place volunteers, as well as solid safety and security-related training for volunteers.

Site development includes locating safe and adequate volunteer housing, finding meaningful work for volunteers, ensuring that volunteers have host country counterparts who understand their roles, and making certain that each host community wants a volunteer. As part of site development, Peace Corps staff coordinate and liaise with local officials and communities. In preparation for their service volunteers receive local language and cultural training that includes understanding the nature of activities and behaviors that increase their risk of becoming ill or being injured. The task of providing a safe and secure environment for our volunteers is a team effort that does not solely depend upon safety and security personnel.

While the acceptance model places significant responsibilities on Peace Corps to ensure volunteer safety, it also requires that volunteers take responsibility for their own safety. This responsibility includes learning the language, adhering to the cultural norms of the community in which they live, and avoiding situations that could increase their risk of becoming ill or being injured.

The acceptance model has its limitations, but past GAO and recent OIG reports confirm it is the most viable model for agencies like the Peace Corps that place volunteers in remote locations and have a small security footprint. However, even with the best possible acceptance model in place, volunteers face risks living, working, and traveling in unfamiliar environments, having a limited (initially, at least) understanding of local languages and culture, and being perceived as a well-off foreigner. While Peace Corps cannot eliminate these risks entirely, it can mitigate them by having in place strong safety and security policies and procedures and implementing them consistently.

Since fiscal year (FY) 2004, OIG has visited 66 posts and issued recommendations related to safety and security at 56 of these posts (85 percent). Additionally, thirty-eight percent (25 out of

66) of these posts were found to be deficient in some aspect of their site development, which is an essential component of the acceptance model of safety and security. Inappropriate site development increases the risk that a volunteer's community safety net will be compromised if a threat arises.

How OIG Reviews of Overseas Posts Address Safety and Security Issues

OIG conducts audits and evaluations of overseas posts. These assess how effectively Peace Corps overseas operations, including post staff, provide support to volunteers. We review whether posts have adequate internal controls and whether they are complying with Peace Corps policies, and federal laws and regulations.

OIG Post Evaluations

Our post evaluations assess how effectively the country program is furthering Peace Corps' mission and goals. We focus on whether volunteers are working productively, and on the quality of posts' efforts to provide volunteers with good health care and personal safety training and support. We examine volunteer work site development, the safety of volunteer housing; and the quality of volunteer training, including language, technical, cross-cultural, health and safety and security training. We assess the adequacy of support provided by post staff—leadership, administrative, programming and training, medical, and safety and security staff members. Our evaluators review whether volunteers understand the post's emergency action plan (EAP) and if they know what to do in case of an emergency evacuation or other disaster. We speak with at least 20 percent of currently-serving volunteers, visit their sites and inspect their homes using the post's housing criteria. My evaluators also provide volunteers with information on OIG resources, for example the OIG hotline and encourage volunteers to contact OIG about any fraud, waste, abuse, misconduct, wrongdoing, or other related problems they encounter. Volunteers are assured that we keep their identities confidential.

During our post evaluations, our evaluators also interview State Department regional security officers (RSOs) at the local embassy to determine whether they are working well with the Peace Corps posts. We also review any recommendations that might have been issued by Peace Corps' safety and security officers (PCSSO) in the region and whether the post has implemented those recommendations.

OIG Post Audits

Our post audits focus on how efficiently and effectively the posts administrative and financial operations are functioning. Our auditors review how post resources are utilized and whether posts are complying with policies and regulations. In regards to safety and security, our auditors interview the RSO to discuss any safety and security concerns. Further, auditors review whether posts have obtained a background security investigation or suitability check on host country staff before they are hired and whether the necessary update has been conducted. This has been one of the most common safety and security issues identified during our audits, 44 percent (28 out of 63) of posts audited since 2004 did not comply. After the policy was revised in September 2009

to include short term contractors, OIG found that 73 percent of posts audited (11 out of 15) had not met this requirement.

OIG Coordination with Chief Compliance Officer

For all of our audits and program evaluations there is a process of corrective action whereby we coordinate with the agency to help ensure recommendations are implemented. Our work is facilitated by the agency's chief compliance office. A new chief compliance officer was hired in August of 2010; previously the position remained vacant for one year and seven months. The chief compliance officer has helped close over 300 recommendations since she started. However, as of May 2011; 205 recommendations remain open. At the post-level, 24 percent (22 out of 91) of open recommendations relate to safety and security issues. Implementing these recommendations often requires extensive coordination across various offices, communicating with field operations, revising or creating policy, and ensuring adequate resources for implementation.

OIG Criminal Investigators

OIG criminal investigators look at whether Peace Corps staff, contractors, and volunteers have violated any criminal laws and whether they have engaged in any misconduct. When OIG criminal investigators conduct overseas investigations, they coordinate with the RSO and FBI legal attaché, and, when appropriate, local host country law enforcement. OIG responded to cases of violent crime against volunteers serving overseas from 2003 to 2008. In 2008 that function was transferred back to the agency because it was determined that safety and security is a program function outside the mandate of the IG Act, as amended. However, we continue to conduct investigations of any crime where a Peace Corps staff member, contractor or volunteer is alleged to have been the perpetrator. We view those cases as misconduct and abuse squarely within OIG's mandate. In addition, we conduct inquiries, as appropriate, related to volunteer deaths and provide oversight over agency responses to volunteer deaths.

Other OIG Responses to Safety and Security of Volunteers

Our office is engaged in a broad range of outreach activities in support of Peace Corps' policy on handling allegations against Peace Corps staff, contractors, and volunteers. In the aftermath of the murder of volunteer Kate Puzey in 2009, the agency issued an interim policy on how to handle sensitive allegations against staff and contractors. Longstanding OIG and Peace Corps policy already provided volunteers the ability to report allegations confidentially to OIG. The interim policy focused on:

- The need for Peace Corps staff to treat allegations confidentially.
- Informing volunteers of their right to report allegations to OIG confidentially and encouraging them to so.
- Ensuring the safety and security of the volunteer making an allegation.
- Reminding staff of their obligations to report allegations to OIG.
- Assuring volunteers that agency policy prohibits reprisal or retaliation.

In January 2011 the interim policy was formalized as a *Peace Corps Manual* section. My staff worked with the agency to develop a training module on complying with this policy. Subsequently we participated in three training sessions for new overseas staff on the policy. We have worked with the agency to ensure the policy is included in the *Volunteer Handbook*. I have communicated directly with country directors (CDs) on the importance of reporting allegations to OIG and maintaining the confidentiality of those making the allegations. I have also provided CDs with OIG materials and posters to distribute and display at posts overseas to inform both staff and volunteers of the mission of the OIG and how to contact us to forward allegations or concerns related to waste, fraud and abuse in Peace Corps programs and operations.

In addition, we are currently conducting an evaluation on how the agency responds to instances of rape and sexual assault in response to the ABC News 20/20 television episode related to allegations of sexual assault of Peace Corps volunteers. We hope to issue a preliminary report by mid summer.

Peace Corps' Office of Safety and Security and Related Reforms since 2002

Madam Chairman, I would like to briefly provide some background on the Peace Corps volunteer safety and security program. In 2002, at the request of Congressman Meehan and Congresswomen McKinney, GAO conducted a review and issued a report of the Peace Corps safety and security program. The report identified several weaknesses including that the safety and security program was unevenly implemented. The following factors contributed to this uneven implementation: unclear guidance, inadequate staff training, spotty supervision and oversight mechanisms, and staff turnover. GAO outlined how the Peace Corps provides broad guidance to support overseas posts but relies on CDs to develop and implement effective safety and security practices.

The GAO report also stated that while volunteers were generally satisfied with the Peace Corps' efforts to provide security training and inform them about their security environments, the Peace Corps showed mixed performance in developing safe and secure housing and work sites for volunteers. The report also mentioned the uneven quality and comprehensiveness of Peace Corps Emergency Action Plans (EAPs), which are required by each post and address emergency situations that would likely impact Peace Corps personnel and operations.

The GAO report further noted a variation in how Peace Corps monitors and responds to volunteer concerns. For instance, while crime incidents had increased, the full extent of crimes against volunteers remained unknown due to underreporting. GAO also noted that it was difficult to interpret Peace Corps' sexual assault data and that the crime data analysis system could be enhanced. At the time of the GAO report, the Office of Medical Services collected information on assaults and produced analyses of violent crime incidences.

The agency's response to the GAO report detailed a number of significant improvements to the way the Peace Corps manages volunteer safety and security. The agency stated that it would create an Office of Safety and Security (SS) "to foster improved communication, coordination, oversight, and accountability for all Peace Corps safety and security efforts." The office would be led by an associate director for safety and security, who would report directly to the Peace

Corps Director, and the office would include the following divisions: Volunteer Safety and Overseas Security; Information and Personnel Security; and Emergency Preparedness Plans, Training, and Exercises. The office would also include a Crime Statistics and Analysis Unit to track crime statistics, identify crime trends, and highlight potential safety risks to volunteers.

In addition, the agency stated that it would authorize all of its overseas posts to employ a full or part-time safety and security coordinator (SSC) and added three new full-time safety and security desk officer positions, one for each region, and four additional field-based Peace Corps safety and security officers (PCSSOs). Furthermore, Peace Corps stated that it would revise its policies to require posts to implement the following six essential safety and security practices:

- Monitor, assess, and disseminate safety and security information to volunteers and trainees
- Continually train volunteers and trainees on culturally appropriate lifestyles and judgment that reduces risks
- Inspect volunteer and trainee work sites before their arrival to ensure housing and work sites are appropriate, safe, and secure
- Establish procedures for reporting safety and security incidents
- Develop and test EAPs
- Establish a system to collect contact and whereabouts information from volunteers when they are away from their communities

As stated in the agency's response, the primary responsibility for SSCs was to monitor and ensure that their post complied with these practices.

OIG Volunteer Safety and Security Audit and Evaluation Reports

More recently, my office issued both an evaluation report in 2008 and an audit report in 2010 focused on the agency's overall volunteer safety and security program. Both reports found that the security program has evolved significantly since the 2002 GAO report, and that the agency has made substantial progress in addressing its safety and security needs, e.g. establishing the office of safety and security, assigning SSCs to each overseas post, hiring nine regional based PCSSOs, and revising its safety and security policies. Yet both our 2010 audit and 2008 evaluation concluded that safety and security policies, procedures, practices, training, and resources were unevenly or inadequately applied.

2008 Safety and Security Evaluation

The safety and security program evaluation issued in 2008 assessed the effectiveness of the six safety and security practices implemented after the 2002 GAO report. Our evaluation contained 20 recommendations; six remain open today. Below are some of the most salient findings included in the report:

- The agency crime data was unreliable and not reported to headquarters in a timely manner. Staff did not have adequate training on the agency's new crime reporting tool.

- Although volunteers were provided with information about global safety and security risk factors, they were not provided country-specific risk factors.
- EAPs did not always contain essential information to facilitate volunteers' speedy and safe consolidation or evacuation from their country of service.
- Peace Corps did not ensure that emergency action plans were consistently tested in accordance with agency policy or under realistic conditions (e.g., in the absence of cell phones.)
- Forms that could be used to locate volunteers' sites in emergency situations were not always fully completed or accurate.
- PCSSOs had provided posts with substantial support; however, their recommendations were not systematically tracked and were often not implemented.
- Volunteers' houses did not always meet the posts' own criteria for safe housing.

At the end of March 2011, the agency submitted documentation to close the remaining six open recommendations. Of the six recommendations, the agency did not concur with one and partially concurred with three. Given that many safety and security practices have evolved since we issued the report in 2008, and that some of the recommendations require a global change in how SS does its work, my office wants to be sure that the action taken meets the intent of the recommendation before we can close them.

2010 Safety and Security Audit

Our audit report, issued in April of 2010, focused on the management and organization of the safety and security function at Peace Corps. Consistent with past reports, we found in 2010 that volunteers overwhelmingly state being satisfied with their level of safety and security and staff support. Moreover, we found that while Peace Corps maintains a much larger safety and security workforce than comparable international non-governmental organizations, safety and security staff at all levels lacked the experience and training needed to perform their jobs.

In addition, our report found that the security program lacked essential elements and did not keep up with the changing needs of the overseas posts because the volunteer safety and security program did not have a clear management structure, and no office accepted complete ownership of it. The audit also found that SS served as a consultative office, not an oversight office. This has resulted in SS relying on the Peace Corps' overseas posts to request its assistance and any recommendations from SS for safety and security improvements to be treated as suggestions. Furthermore, the audit determined that organizational structures and personnel practices have not matched the agency's shift in safety and security roles and responsibilities, causing confusion and inconsistencies in the program.

Specifically, the report found that the agency had not:

- Developed a comprehensive security strategy and plan that articulated how the agency's security policies related to the acceptance model.
- Directed the SS office to provide management and oversight of the safety and security program, including SSCs at posts.

- Aligned safety and security personnel's roles and responsibilities with the agency's stated priority of safety and security. We found that unclear lines of authority and communication created a weak safety and security structure and organization – insufficient input overall on agency operations and lack of oversight of post budget and operations. Essentially, regions and CDs, not SS, the office established to oversee and implement the Peace Corps safety and security program, drive safety and security priorities.
- Defined the skills and experience needed for all security positions; provided consistent training and development tracks that matched responsibilities; and developed standard operating procedures for performing duties.
- Consistently hired people with the skills and experience to fill its safety and security positions – including the SSCs at the posts and the regionally-based PCSSOs.
- Clearly defined the roles of headquarters safety and security staff and field safety and security staff to avoid unclear expectations and duplicate responsibilities.
- Standardized training for safety and security personnel.
- Consistently tracked and ensured that corrective action on PCSSO recommendations were taken.

All of these findings point to a volunteer safety and security program which has not been implemented evenly, increasing potential risks to volunteers. Since FY 2004 OIG issued recommendations related to staff roles, responsibilities and training at 23 percent of posts visited (15 out of 66).

Since the issuance of our 2010 audit report, the Peace Corps has taken important steps to close recommendations and improve its safety and security program. The more significant steps include:

- July 2010 – the Director issued a decision memorandum announcing that the SS would assume responsibility for technical oversight of the positions of safety and security coordinator and safety and security desk officer.
- September 2010 – SS defined training requirements for PCSSOs and SSCs. SS provided training for the safety and security personnel at its biannual conference.
- December 2010– Peace Corps reissued several *Peace Corps Manual* sections to include the revised safety and security roles and responsibilities.
- February and March 2011 – Peace Corps developed the "Peace Corps' Safety and Security Strategy", *Before You Go...* [the Volunteer Safety and Security Handbook] and standard operating procedures for safety and security personnel. In addition, the agency issued revised *Peace Corps Staff Guidelines for Responding to Rape and Major Sexual Assault*, and required that staff training on the new guidelines be performed at every Peace Corps post.
- In addition, SS increased its oversight function by developing a process to verify whether required security background investigations and suitability checks for personal services contractors have been performed.

Despite the agency's substantial progress in reforming its safety and security program, my primary concerns continue to revolve around uneven implementation. Our post audits and

evaluations have indicated that posts have not been fully compliant with essential safety and security policies despite the numerous positions established to ensure and track implementation of these policies. Unclear procedures lead to potentially serious gaps in the safety and security process. We have found situations in which responses to crimes were inadequate and incomplete because staff roles were not clearly defined and communicated. Poorly defined staff responsibilities and unclear lines of authorities only increase risk to our volunteers when a timely and competent response by agency personnel is needed.

In our view a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to formalize the relationship between the State Department and the Peace Corps is a critical step to improving the agency's capacity to effectively respond to security situations. The MOU would define the roles and responsibilities of both agencies in supporting volunteer safety and security overseas and would serve as an essential protocol for adequately responding to volunteer safety and security incidents.

To date the agency has provided sufficient information to close 23 of 28 recommendations from our 2010 safety and security audit. We continue to collaborate closely with agency management, provide needed clarifications and comments to its proposed actions, as well as general advice with the aim of closing all remaining open safety and security recommendations. Closing the recommendations is an important step but it is not sufficient in and of itself. The agency will need to monitor the safety and security program to ensure the changes take hold. I believe that the successful implementation of these recommendations will depend in large part on whether SS functions as the management and oversight office it was intended to be, rather than a consultative office for overseas posts, providing assistance and suggestions when requested. For our part we plan to conduct a follow-up review on the effectiveness of implementing these measures in FY 2012.

Conclusion

The Peace Corps has a decentralized organizational structure in which top management relies primarily on CDs and their staff to manage programs and operations overseas, including its safety and security program. This model must have clear lines of communication, well established policies and procedures, and adequate management oversight functions at headquarters to ensure overseas posts are efficient and effective. In this regard, our audits and evaluations continue to highlight areas where management oversight is lacking and standard operating procedures are not in place. As a result, there is a lot of disparity among posts due to the quality and expertise of staff members and their ability to develop their own methods of managing safety and security challenges.

While some important OIG recommendations remain open, the agency has made substantial progress in recent years in developing a comprehensive safety and security program. Director Williams has pledged his full support to remediate all safety and security related findings and we are working with agency management to help ensure critical recommendations are implemented. The agency has shared drafts of their overall security strategy, revised policies, and developed a proposed memorandum of understanding with the State Department.

In conclusion Madam Chairman, putting in place a more effective Peace Corps volunteer safety and security function will require continued vigilance, prioritization of initiatives, greater accountability and management oversight, more emphasis on hiring and retaining quality security professionals, adequate financial and training resources, a focus on implementation, and greater coordination with other agencies like the State Department. While follow-through on these items and our recommendations will be challenging, it is necessary to ensure Peace Corps' sustainability for the next 50 years.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much for your testimony.

I wanted to ask about Kate Puzey's murder. As you know, in March 2009, Kate, a Peace Corps volunteer serving as a teacher in Benin, Africa, was murdered. Shortly before that terrible crime, Kate sent an e-mail to the country director identifying her accused killer, a teacher, and as engaging in inappropriate relationships with and sexually harassing students.

Kate requested that the e-mail remain anonymous. However, the agency's Inspector General later found that this e-mail was mishandled. And I have some questions about that. Can you tell us what happened? Did the Peace Corps terminate the employment of those responsible?

And suppose that lamentably this exact same scenario repeated itself, a Peace Corps volunteer reported to the Peace Corps officials about an individual who could pose a risk to the volunteer safety and requesting anonymity obviously. How would the Peace Corps today protect that volunteer?

And, lastly, are there any legislative measures that we can take to strengthen safety and security in support of prosecutions in foreign countries?

Ms. BULLER. My office did conduct a review, an administrative review, of the information flow that occurred prior to the death of Kate Puzey. What we did find was that the e-mail that she sent confidentially to the country director and additionally another person was compromised, that this information was inappropriately disclosed.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. What happened to the employment of those responsible for the e-mail and the outing of the person who sent that e-mail, Kate?

Ms. BULLER. None of those individuals are with the Peace Corps anymore.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Are they no longer in the Peace Corps because of this or for other reasons?

Ms. BULLER. They are no longer in the Peace Corps because of this.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. They are no longer in the Peace Corps because of this?

Ms. BULLER. Yes.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Suppose that a volunteer would send communications or would somehow communicate to a Peace Corps official about a problem that that volunteer is incurring in asking for anonymity. How would the Peace Corps protect that volunteer today? What has changed?

Ms. BULLER. Today there is a protocol in place or policy in place that mandates that any allegation by a volunteer or a trainee that is made in confidence be kept in confidence and held in the closest discretion by Peace Corps staff receiving that allegation. The volunteer or the trainee is also advised that they can come to the IG and actually are encouraged to come to the IG with these allegations since we handle confidential allegations all the time and actually have a statutory mandate to keep our allegations confidential.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. Understanding how difficult it is to get prosecutions in foreign countries, before we enter

into agreements to send volunteers to the countries, is the Peace Corps being aggressive with the host country in saying that these cases must be handled in the serious manner that they merit?

Ms. BULLER. I believe that the director was probably in the best position to answer that question. From our perspective, there are some things that just won't be prosecuted overseas. It would be helpful if we had the ability to prosecute them here. There could be a legislative change that would allow the U.S. to have jurisdiction of some violent crimes committed against Peace Corps volunteers.

For example, if they were considered to be employees of the United States Government, for purposes of that type of a prosecution, they are currently considered employees for FECA purposes. So it would be along those similar lines.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you.

Has the Peace Corps implemented—I know you spoke about it in your testimony—all of your audit recommendations regarding safety and security? If not, which ones remain open? And, what is the most important change that the agency can make to improve safety and security?

Ms. BULLER. I want to just clarify your question, Madam Chairman, if I can. Are we talking about the audit or the evaluation? Either one?

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Either one. It was about the audit, but the evaluation is good, too.

Ms. BULLER. I would like to address the evaluation in particular since those recommendations, the ones that are currently open have been open since 2008. The recommendations we made in the evaluation that are continuing to be open concern the accuracy of incident reporting, volunteer incident reporting. We would like the agency to have the country director review those incident reports before they are submitted to headquarters. That is still open.

We also would like the Office of Safety and Security to provide pre-service training to volunteers and how they can effectively respond to a violent attack in a culturally appropriate way given the country that they are in. That has not happened.

We also would like the regional directors to establish housing criteria and make sure that housing criteria is implemented across the board. That remains open.

We also would like the Office of Safety and Security to make sure that all of its staff is trained in making certain that all of the safety and security recommendations are complied with.

There is an open recommendation concerning the Emergency Action Plans. We made the recommendation that they be tested yearly and in a variety of situations, not just a single situation—that remains open—and that the staff when they are conducting site development fill out the site locator forms that currently the Peace Corps volunteers do on their own, instead of having the Peace Corps volunteers fill them out. We continually find in our country program evaluations that these site locator forms are often not accurate. Our evaluators take them to go locate the volunteers. And it is very difficult to find them.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much.

Mr. Berman?

Mr. BERMAN. Thank you.

Elaborate on this evaluation of Peace Corps response to sexual assault. What is the scope of your sexual assault review? And what is the method by which you will incorporate the view of survivors and currently serving volunteers?

Ms. BULLER. The scope of the review, we have tried to limit it to more recent, like the past 2 years or so, with the hopes of being able to identify individuals who were with the Peace Corps who are still with the Peace Corps who may have been involved in the response to the sexual assault for the volunteer. We are——

Mr. BERMAN. You are talking about the staff of the Peace Corps?

Ms. BULLER. Staff. Yes, sir. Staff. Given the 5-year rule and——

Mr. BERMAN. This is about staff response?

Ms. BULLER. Yes, staff response. Yes, sir. We are reaching out to various organizations. We have reached out to First Response and asked them to reach out to its members to allow them to come in and speak with us about their circumstances. We, of course, don't want to just call sexual assault victims out of the cold and start asking them questions and make them relive their trauma. So we are soliciting input through organizations who have contact with those individuals.

Mr. BERMAN. So in this case, your evaluation isn't just focused on your examination of what the staff tells you they responded, but you are trying to get a base of data from the victims about their views of how the staff responded?

Ms. BULLER. Exactly, Congressman. We're trying to get their view of how the staff responded and try to marry it up with what we find in the records that the Peace Corps has.

Mr. BERMAN. Okay. In your 2010 audit, you stated that Peace Corps didn't have an adequate process to ensure potential volunteers are fully informed of the security risks before being sent overseas. Do you feel that Peace Corps has sufficiently addressed this issue that was disclosed in your 2010 audit?

Ms. BULLER. That particular recommendation remains open at this time. We are currently working with the agency to try to address it, but as of this time, it has not been addressed.

Mr. BERMAN. That is, fully disclosing the security risks of the place where that person is going to be based before they leave Washington?

Ms. BULLER. Yes, sir. We recommended that that be done at staging when they bring all of the trainees into Washington or whatever other——

Mr. BERMAN. Not in-country?

Ms. BULLER. Not in-country.

Mr. BERMAN. And you have done audits relating to the medical office of the Peace Corps as well as the safety and security office. How do you think a victim's advocate logically would fit in this structure in terms of dealing with the medical office and the safety and security office?

Ms. BULLER. I think where they placed the position currently in Peace Corps is probably the best place for it. They placed it directly under the Director. So that person doesn't report to anybody but the Director and will have communications between both the medical staff and the office of——

Mr. BERMAN. Those offices, the medical office, the safety and security office, will have obligations to provide information that the victims' advocate requests?

Ms. BULLER. That is my understanding of how it works. Yes, sir.

Mr. BERMAN. So you think they are placed right to get this information?

Ms. BULLER. I think the person who would seek that information, it would be required that they report directly to the Director to have the hammer I guess is what you call it to make people respond to them, yes.

Mr. BERMAN. Thank you, Madam Chairman. I yield back my 50 seconds.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Berman.

Mr. Smith?

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much. Thank you for your reports. You have done a wonderful job.

Let me ask. You heard Mr. Aaron Williams, I should say, say earlier in response to my question in 2009, there were 61 percent of those where there was an allegation made that resulted in an arrest. Do we know what happened before, in '08 and '07, what has happened in 2010? And does your office have any information about what happened after those arrests in terms of convictions and people actually serving time in prison before that?

Ms. BULLER. No. My office does not have that information. I can get the information for you from the previous years and supply that for the record.

Mr. SMITH. Okay. Is that something that you could look into and——

Ms. BULLER. Yes, sir.

Mr. SMITH. But I am talking about the conviction rates and the incarceration and for how many years because obviously the crime and the punishment should be commensurate with the crime, the punishment ought to be.

Ms. BULLER. Yes. That is something we could definitely look into.

[The information referred to follows:]

Responses of Peace Corps Inspector General Kathy A. Buller

Submitted to Representative Christopher H. Smith

Hearing: "Peace Corps at 50"

The following information relates to rapes/attempted rapes and major sexual assaults that occurred in 2007 and 2008.

Prior to September 1, 2008, the OIG Investigation Unit managed and coordinated the agency's participation in the investigation and prosecution process of cases involving violent crimes committed against Peace Corps Volunteers. In September 2008 this function was transferred to the Peace Corps Office of Safety and Security; however, OIG has retained oversight of cases in which OIG was involved prior to the transfer.

The statistics below are for the crimes of Rape, Attempted Rape, and Major Sexual Offense for 2007 and 2008, in which OIG opened 58 cases. Volunteers chose to proceed with the prosecution in 26 (45%) cases. Volunteers declined to be involved in the prosecution in 32 (55%) cases. Arrests were made in 20 cases (34%).

Of those arrests made, what percentage resulted in convictions? **60% (12 cases)**

Of those convictions, what percentage resulted in prison sentences? **100%**

Of those individuals who received a prison sentence, were there any individuals who failed to commence their sentence or who were released prior to the completion of their sentence as of the date of this hearing? **While we have no information indicating that individuals failed to commence their sentence or were released prior to the completion of their sentence as of the date of the hearing, we did not specifically receive or track this information.**

The following country specific data applies to the arrests and convictions for the same period of time as above.

(a) arrests not made following the filing of a report: **Swaziland, Mongolia Botswana , Bolivia, Dominican Republic, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde Islands, Paraguay, Nicaragua, and Namibia.**

(b) arrests which did not result in convictions: **Vanuatu, Uganda, Peru**

(c) convictions that did not result in prison sentences: **None**

(d) convicted individuals who were released prior to the completion of their prison sentence. **Not applicable (see response above.)**

Mr. SMITH. Because that will give us a better barometer, I would suggest, respectfully, as to whether or not a country is serious. They may give us a ton of rhetoric, but it really does lie in whether or not these men go to prison.

Let me just ask you, if I could, about when it comes to safety versus mission, I would argue that safety trumps everything. Mission is important, but there is not an acceptable risk for a Peace Corps volunteer, really.

Some people in the State Department choose hazardous deployments. They get hazardous pay. Very often they go without their

spouse and family because of it. Are there places that ought to be deemed off limits where there has been a pattern of abuse in not just countries but subdivisions within those countries where that area ought to be put off limits?

Ms. BULLER. That is a very good question, Congressman. That is really a management decision that should be made by the agency. My office can review those decisions and make assessments as to whether or not they have applied the criteria that they have developed in order to make those placements, but that is a management decision.

Mr. SMITH. Is it something you might include in your recommendations? Because it seems to me that in response to the IG, you have provided the blueprint for the Peace Corps to act. So perhaps you could incorporate that into your general recommendations because it seems to me to send a women, you might say, "Oh, this country is fine but not that part of the country" and she walks right into harm's way.

Let me ask you, too. You have testified that many of your recommendations remain enacted upon. Are there instances where the Peace Corps has gone beyond what the IG has recommended? Have they been proactive in areas that even your office did not anticipate or are they reactive?

Ms. BULLER. They are primarily reactive. I can't think of a situation off the top of my head. If I do, however, I will provide it to you for the record.

Mr. SMITH. Okay. I mean, it is unfortunate. They should be exceeding. Once you brought the attention back in the early part of this decade, they should have been working on this night and day to ensure that those women are in the safest environment imaginable. And to think that year in/year out they might, some women might, be going back to where 2 years ago this same program director, like in Nepal, where Carol Marie Clark, as you heard, testified that the Nepalese Peace Corps program director was telling her and other women that in order to get their checks, they had to have sex with him and that the volunteer country director said that they ought to get a thicker skin to deal with that kind of harassment and threat.

So the next question would be, what happens to people? Is there any record of what has happened when an allegation is made against a superior, whether it be indigenous to that country or an American serving abroad? Are charges brought against them? And how do we vet?

I mean, it seems to me that this program director because he did rape her eventually, as she testified, this director found a place where he would have an ongoing group of women coming in, would wait for the opportunity if he couldn't coerce them to begin with. In this case, she was partying, couldn't stop him. And how many times did he do it before and after?

I'm sure she was not the only one that he raped. And I'm wondering what happens to somebody like that? You know, we have found, I would say, Madam Chair, in the area of peacekeeping because I have held hearings on the deployment of peacekeepers in DR Congo and elsewhere who rape 13-year-olds. And then they find themselves on another redeployment somewhere else under

the zero tolerance policy of the Secretary General of the United Nations. If you could speak to that, please?

Ms. BULLER. There are processes in place for getting rid of local hire staff, where they are PSCs or direct hires. I think the better provision would be not to hire people like that. And we have made recommendations concerning the lack of security background checks for host country staff and contractors.

There has been, as I said in my testimony, 44 percent of countries that we went into did not comply with that—and it has gone up since they changed the requirements to include short-term contractors.

So there is a real need for compliance with that particular recommendation. And if they did comply with it, situations like that would be prevented.

Mr. SMITH. I would hope—and I hope the Peace Corps takes this to heart—that if there is one instance of an allegation being made, that is enough to trigger a significant investigation so we don't wait until that woman herself is raped or others who are in a similarly vulnerable position.

Thank you so much.

Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Smith.

Thank you, Ms. Buller. And we are all highly supportive of the great mission and the work of the Peace Corps. We want to make sure that it is a polished jewel and that we will make the recommendations that we hope the Peace Corps will implement to secure the safety of all of the volunteers and change the culture from blaming the victim to supporting the victim and holding the perpetrators of this violence accountable for their acts.

And, with that, our committee is adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 12:35 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

Material Submitted for the Hearing Record

FULL COMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515-0128

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Chairman

May 4, 2011

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held in **Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live, via the WEBCAST link on the Committee website at http://www.hcfa.house.gov):**

DATE: Wednesday, May 11, 2011

TIME: 9:30 a.m.

SUBJECT: Peace Corps at 50

WITNESSES:

Panel 1: Problems of Safety and Security
Ms. Jessica Smochek
Former Peace Corps Volunteer

Ms. Carol Clark
Former Peace Corps Volunteer

Karestan Chase Koenen, Ph.D.
Former Peace Corps Volunteer

Ms. Lois Puzey
Parent of Late Peace Corps Volunteer

Ms. Jennifer Wilson Marsh
Hotline and Affiliate Service Director
RAINN

Panel 2: Assessment and Reform
The Honorable Aaron S. Williams
Director
Peace Corps

Panel 3: A View from the Inspector General
Ms. Kathy A. Buller
Inspector General
Peace Corps

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

Day *Wednesday* **Date** *May 11, 2011* **Room** *2172 Rayburn*

Starting Time *9:35 a.m.* **Ending Time** *12:35 p.m.*

Recesses [ ] (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session [✓]
Executive (closed) Session [ ]
Televised [✓]
Electronically Recorded (taped) [✓]
Stenographic Record [✓]

TITLE OF HEARING:

Peace Corps at 50

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Attendance Attached

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Senator Isaacson

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes [✓] **No** [ ]
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

Rep. Chris Smith QFR
Rep. Tsongas SFR
Rep. Connolly SFR
Rep. Poe SFR
Chairman Ros-Lehtinen QFR
ISTSS SFR

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED *12:35 p.m.*

Jean Carroll, Director of Committee Operations

Hearing/Briefing Title: **Peace Corps at 50**

Date: **May 11, 2011**

Present	Member
X	Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, FL
X	Christopher Smith, NJ
	Dan Burton, IN
X	Elton Gallegly, CA
X	Dana Rohrabacher, CA
	Donald Manzullo, IL
	Edward R. Royce, CA
X	Steve Chabot, OH
	Ron Paul, TX
	Mike Pence, IN
	Joe Wilson, SC
	Connie Mack, FL
	Jeff Fortenberry, NE
	Michael McCaul, TX
X	Ted Poe, TX
X	Gus M. Bilirakis, FL
X	Jean Schmidt, OH
	Bill Johnson, OH
X	David Rivera, FL
X	Mike Kelly, PA
	Tim Griffin, AK
X	Tom Marino, PA
	Jeff Duncan, SC
X	Ann Marie Buerkle, NY
	Renee Ellmers, NC

Present	Member
X	Howard L. Berman, CA
	Gary L. Ackerman, NY
	Eni F.H. Faleomavaega, AS
X	Donald M. Payne, NJ
	Brad Sherman, CA
	Eliot Engel, NY
	Gregory Meeks, NY
X	Russ Carnahan, MO
X	Albio Sires, NJ
X	Gerry Connolly, VA
X	Ted Deutch, FL
	Dennis Cardoza, CA
X	Ben Chandler, KY
X	Brian Higgins, NY
	Allyson Schwartz, PA
	Chris Murphy, CT
X	Frederica Wilson, FL
X	Karen Bass, CA
	William Keating, MA
X	David Cicilline, RI

Responses of Peace Corps Director Aaron S. Williams

To Questions for the Record

Submitted by Chairman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen

House Committee on Foreign Affairs

Hearing: "Peace Corps at 50"

1. Section 270 of the Peace Corps Manual addresses, among other things, procedures for responding to incidents:

   . . .

   7.0 Volunteer Incident Management

   Each post must establish specific procedures for V/Ts [Volunteers/Trainees] to report incidents, as well as procedures for how post will receive and respond to such incidents.

   These procedures must reflect a victim-centered response that ensures:

   • V/Ts receive appropriate and timely support to assist in addressing physical, emotional, financial, and legal needs, in addition to immediate security concerns.

   • Information is disseminated promptly to the Peace Corps staff that needs to act promptly in support of the V/T.

   • Sensitive information about a V/T incident is only shared as permitted by Peace Corps privacy policy.

   • Posts review and analyze victimization trends and use this information to improve training, better allocate resources, and make other program adjustments.

   • V/Ts are encouraged to report safety and security incidents.

   I have instructed my staff to provide written guidance this summer to posts addressing the appropriate steps for staff to take when Volunteers express concerns about their safety.

2. On May 10, 2011, a joint memorandum from the Associate Directors for Global Operations, Safety and Security, and Volunteer Support was issued to all Country Directors, Program and Training Directors, Medical Officers and Safety and Security Officers announcing immediate discontinuance of the training video entitled *Serving Safely: Guarding Against Sexual Assault*. The memorandum advised that new training materials are being developed, and directed staff to contact the relevant Safety and Security Officer or the Program and Training Expert in Volunteer Support for assistance with other curricula or material in the interim.

3. The Peace Corps complies with all applicable laws governing privacy including the Privacy Act and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and makes every effort to protect the identity of victims of sexual assault. As the agency's *Commitment to Sexual Assault Victims* states, "We will respect your privacy and will not, without your consent, disclose your identity or share the details of the incident with anyone who does not have a legitimate need to know."

   While certain staff may need to be informed that a sexual assault has occurred in order to carry out their functions, including to provide for the safety and security of other Volunteers, personally identifiable information such as the identity of the victim of the sexual assault is restricted to those who have a need to know in order to respond to the incident or provide support and/or assistance to the victim of the sexual assault.

   Peace Corps Volunteers are instructed to report crimes to staff at post in order to ensure that they receive the support and care they need and that the agency is able to provide for their safety and that of other Volunteers. Through steps such as the issuance of Peace Corps' *Commitment to Sexual Assault Victims* and *Guidelines for Responding to Rape and Sexual Assault*, the Peace Corps has attempted to encourage victims of sexual assault to report these crimes.

   The Peace Corps is looking into the possibility of alternative reporting structures that would allow victims of sexual assault to obtain confidential assistance without formally reporting the crime. It is important, however, to ensure that any alternative reporting structure does not undermine the Peace Corps' responsibility to provide for the safety of all our Volunteers.

4. Peace Corps Manual Section 271 dealing with Handling of Volunteer/Trainee Allegations addresses the need for confidentiality with respect to allegations and concerns from Volunteers and Trainees. Overseas staff has been trained in this Manual Section and materials about it have been distributed to posts. The Peace Corps Volunteer Handbook, which is provided to applicants when they are invited to serve as Volunteers, states that "any Peace Corps staff member receiving an allegation from a Volunteer or trainee must treat the information with the utmost discretion and confidentiality consistent with appropriate handling of the allegation and applicable law."

   A willful breach of the confidentiality required by any statute or regulation, including a breach of the provisions of Peace Corps Manual Section 271, would normally constitute an offense for which discipline would be imposed. The reprimanding, suspension, or termination of a foreign service employee for personal cause is subject to the procedures set forth in Peace Corps Manual Section 652. The severity of the penalty imposed for a breach depends upon consideration of mitigating and aggravating factors set forth in case law by the Merit Systems Protection Board.

   For cases involving less severe penalties, officially designated unit heads in the United States and Country Directors overseas are authorized to both propose and decide to issue official reprimands to their subordinates. For cases involving more severe penalties, the authority to propose a suspension or a termination for cause is delegated to officially

designated unit supervisors in the United States and to Country Directors for overseas staff. The authority to decide is delegated to the Associate Directors, the General Counsel, and Directors of Staff Offices.

Peace Corps Country Directors are not subject to Peace Corps Manual Section 652 and their appointments may be terminated at the discretion of the Director at any time without notice, notwithstanding any other provision of law or the Peace Corps Manual. Termination of appointment is a possible consequence of a Country Director's willful breach of confidentiality. This would be a decision made personally by the Director.

5. The Peace Corps has taken a number of steps to help ensure that victims of sexual assault who wish to prosecute are able to do so, and that staff respond with compassion and timely support to such incidents:

- Peace Corps' *Guidelines for Responding to Rape and Sexual Assault* require staff to inform victims about their legal rights and how to preserve the option to prosecute. They also require that staff preserve physical evidence to the extent possible and that staff familiarize themselves in advance with local laws regarding the collection, processing and storage of evidence. The relevant staff at posts received training earlier this year on the *Guidelines*.
- The Peace Corps strongly encourages Volunteers who are victims of sexual assault to undergo a sexual assault examination so that they can preserve evidence in the event that they choose to file charges and participate in a prosecution at a later date. In the event that the Volunteer consents to such an examination, Peace Corps staff work with local authorities and health care providers to ensure that the examination complies with the requirements of local law. Peace Corps posts are required to keep sexual assault examination kits on hand in the event that they are needed for this purpose.
- When it is required for, or materially beneficial to, the prosecution of the case, the Peace Corps may hire a local lawyer to represent a Volunteer who is the victim of a serious crime to assist in the criminal prosecution of that crime. The local lawyer is provided by the Peace Corps at no expense to the Volunteer.

I have asked Peace Corps' Inspector General to incorporate the testimony and affidavits submitted to the Committee by or on behalf of former or current Volunteers who were victims of sexual assault, as she deems appropriate, into her ongoing independent assessment of the agency's support for victims.

6. As stated during my testimony before the Committee, the Peace Corps recently hired our first Victim's Advocate, Kellie Greene, formerly with Speaking Out About Rape (SOAR). The Victim's Advocate is in the process of familiarizing herself with and assessing our organizational structures and systems to ensure Peace Corps Volunteers who have been victims of sexual assault or other crimes receive the support they need. While proposals for regional or roving advocates deserve serious consideration, I believe that any decisions about the staffing and support needs of the Victim's Advocate would be premature until that process is complete.

7. Senior Peace Corps staff has had preliminary discussions with staff from the Department of Labor to discuss closer coordination and cooperation on FECA claims by former Volunteers. We intend to continue these discussions with the Department of Labor until a satisfactory solution is achieved. In the meantime, our Office of Volunteer Support is working to assist Volunteers to the extent practicable under existing structures while the Victim's Advocate considers ways to improve the current system.

8. Extensive safety and security information and resources, including Peace Corps' *Commitment to Sexual Assault Victims*, *Frequently Asked Questions about Safety and Volunteer Support*, and the *Fact Sheet on Sexual Assault Prevention and Response* are available to current Volunteers, applicants, and the general public on the Peace Corps website, www.peacecorps.gov.

   Electronic versions of these documents were sent to all Country Directors and field staff, and overseas staff was directed to share this information with all currently serving Volunteers. Information pertaining to Peace Corps' sexual assault risk reduction and response program will also be included in future versions of the *Peace Corps Volunteer Handbook*.

   The Peace Corps' *Guidelines for Responding to Rape and Sexual Assault*, which detail the procedures for overseas staff to follow when handling incidents of sexual assault and rape, have been distributed to overseas staff, and training on these guidelines has been conducted for overseas staff at all posts.

9. The Peace Corps is committed to taking care of Volunteer victims with compassion and dignity. As part of the agency's victim-centered approach, the Peace Corps has comprehensive protocols for its overseas staff that outline procedures to be followed and support services to be provided when assisting a Volunteer who has been a victim of a sexual assault.

   Volunteers who are victims of sexual assault can expect to receive extensive support as it relates to their safety, medical and psychological care, legal options, and continued service with the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps has implemented new *Guidelines for Responding to Rape and Major Sexual Assault* that detail the agency's victim-centered approach and the specific procedures posts must follow in order to respond promptly to an incident and provide proper support to a victim. Training on these guidelines has been conducted for overseas staff at all posts.

   All Peace Corps employees are expected to follow agency policy. The potential consequences for failure to follow agency policy are discussed in the answer to question 4, above.

10. Peace Corps Manual Sections 743, 744 and 602 specify the background investigation requirements for personal services contractors and foreign service national staff at post. Copies of those Manual Sections are attached.

    As of May 2011, over 97% of overseas staff has received the required background investigation. All Country Directors have been instructed to comply with these

requirements and two staffers in the Office of Safety and Security at headquarters have been charged with monitoring compliance.

11. In its 2010 *Audit of Peace Corps' Volunteer Safety and Security Program*, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) recommended that the agency "provide [future] Volunteers with a consolidated handbook on the basic principles of Volunteer safety during the recruitment and staging processes." That recommendation has been closed by the OIG. The OIG also recommended that the Agency ensure that information presented to future Volunteers "adequately addresses security risks, teaches steps to mitigate those risks, and identifies key Peace Corps personnel involved in the security process." The Peace Corps is in the process of preparing standardized training that will be provided in-country to satisfy this recommendation.

    When we invite applicants to serve as Volunteers, we provide them with country-specific information on health, safety, and security, including crime data. Before they begin their service, Volunteers receive an average of 10 weeks of in-country training that covers, among other things, the risks they may face at post. The pre-service training is tailored to address the specific circumstances Volunteers face at that particular post, including the crime risks. The Peace Corps also institutes measures, as needed, to enhance the safety and security of Volunteers serving at particular posts, such as restricting the times when Volunteers may travel, the mode of transportation used, and the areas that Volunteers may visit.

12. The Peace Corps is working closely with the State Department to develop the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Completion of the MOU is an agency priority and it is my hope that the MOU will be completed within 6 months. While the draft MOU does not address a victims' assistance program, Peace Corps' Victim's Advocate is working to enhance our efforts to assist victims.

13. Peace Corps' policy with respect to escorts for medical evacuations is included in Section 264 of the Peace Corps Manual, which provides, in relevant part:

    ...
    4.2.6 Escorts

    The majority of medevac'd V/Ts [Volunteers/Trainees] travel without an escort from the post to the medevac location. In some cases, however, it is necessary for an escort to travel with the V/T at Peace Corps expense. The PCMO shall determine the need to appoint an escort and the level of care needed for the V/T. (A second escort may be selected in unusual circumstances only if determined as necessary by the PCMO.) As appropriate, the escort may provide medical care en-route, continuous medical monitoring for the V/T, emotional support, and/or physical assistance. The escort may be a medical professional, a post staff member, or a PCV, but not a family member of the evacuee at Peace Corps expense. Spouses or dependents may, under certain circumstances, accompany the evacuee during travel as set out in Section 4.2.7, but are not considered to be escorts.

If the PCMO selects a post staff member or another Volunteer as an escort, the PCMO must obtain the concurrence of the CD so that the post staff and program needs are considered.

The PCMO shall ensure that the escort:
(a) Understands his or her responsibilities;

(b) Is aware of the medical support needs of the patient, and be capable of providing the support;

(c) Hand-carries the medical files and related evacuation documents, and provides the receiving medical staff with all necessary information;

(d) Physically accompanies the patient from the point of overseas departure to the designated destination;

(e) Understands that the responsibility for the V/T remains with the escort until the V/T is accepted by a medical facility or by the OMS staff or PCMO at the destination;

(f) Complies with the confidentiality requirements of the Privacy Act, HIPAA, and Peace Corps confidentiality policies, concerning the V/T's illness, symptoms, behavior revealed during travel, etiology or cause of illness, treatment, and other information related to the V/T's privacy; and

(g) Is fully briefed and given written instructions concerning airports, hotels, taxis, contact telephone numbers and any other pertinent information.

Once the escort has delivered the V/T to the appropriate destination, he or she is generally expected to return to country. If the escort is another V/T or post staff, he or she is allowed a maximum of 72 hours at the evacuation site to recover from the trip before returning to post. Any additional leave must be approved by the CD.

The Peace Corps would be open to discussing proposed changes to this policy, as well as the need for medevac'd Volunteers to be met by Peace Corps staff, with the Committee.

14. Mental health counselors in Peace Corps's Counseling and Outreach Unit at headquarters are trained to deal with emergencies and offer support to both victims and their families. Most of the counselors have attended workshops or have had special training on sexual trauma. The unit trains Peace Corps medical staff at posts to provide initial emotional support services to all Volunteers, including victims of sexual assault. Peace Corps Medical Officers (PCMOs) have received training in the *Guidelines for Responding to Rape and Sexual Assault*, which includes our *Commitment to Sexual Assault Victims.* That *Commitment* makes clear that no victim is responsible for a sexual assault. New PCMOs receive Medical Overseas Staff Training that covers, among other things, treating victims of sexual assault. This training is periodically reinforced in the Continuing Medical Education conferences that PCMOs attend annually.

Should a Volunteer need specialized care that is beyond the expertise of Peace Corps medical staff, the Peace Corps will provide access to medical professionals who can effectively support the Volunteer's needs. The agency does not contract with those professionals; it simply makes referrals, and it pays for the medical care received by the Volunteer. These referral physicians in the United States are credentialed through Peace Corps' health benefits administrator panel and are board certified in their specialties. Volunteers who have been medevac'd are asked to evaluate the medical care they received and the agency considers those responses, as well as any other feedback we receive, in deciding whether to continue referring Volunteers to those professionals.

As noted above, I have asked Peace Corps' Inspector General to incorporate the testimony and affidavits submitted to the Committee by or on behalf of former or current Volunteers who were victims of sexual assault, as she deems appropriate, into her ongoing independent assessment of the agency's support for victims.

15. Peace Corps has issued a *Commitment to Sexual Assault Victims* in which the agency pledges to, among other things, treat victims with dignity and respect, take appropriate steps to provide for their ongoing safety, help them understand the relevant legal processes and legal options, and protect their privacy. The Commitment will be included in future versions of the *Peace Corps Volunteer Handbook*, and it will be included in training we are developing for Volunteers.

16. The Chief Compliance Officer (CCO) is charged with coordinating efforts among the relevant Peace Corps departments to ensure closure of audit and evaluation recommendations made by the Office of Inspector General (OIG). Since the new Chief Compliance Officer took office in August 2010, over 300 recommendations made by the OIG have been closed. In the last semi-annual reporting period of October 1, 2010 to March 31, 2011, the OIG issued 218 new recommendations. Of those 218 recommendations, 101 were closed in the same reporting period.

    Of the 205 open recommendations referenced by the Inspector General during her testimony: four have been closed by the OIG; 13 have been submitted to the OIG for its review; 33 are with the CCO for review prior to submission to the OIG; 55 are scheduled to be completed in the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2011 or first quarter of fiscal year 2012 pending agency activities such as trainings or implementation of software; 95 are in various stages of implementation by Peace Corps headquarters offices and/or overseas posts; and five are either non-concurrences or actions taken by the agency but not agreed to for closure by the OIG.

    The six open recommendations from the 2008 *Final Program Evaluation Report: Volunteer Safety and Security* have been submitted to the OIG for its review.

17. The extension of U.S. jurisdiction to serious crimes committed overseas against Peace Corps Volunteers would enable U.S. law enforcement authorities to prosecute the alleged perpetrator in cases where, for whatever reason, the local authorities where the crime was committed are unable or unwilling to do so. However, there are serious issues involving the extraterritorial application of U.S. law, as well as concerns about the implications of extending employee status to Peace Corps Volunteers for certain purposes, that need to

be considered. We would need to consult further with officials from the Department of State and the Department of Justice before being able to take a position on this proposal.

18. Criteria for volunteer housing, and requirements regarding site inspections and visits, are addressed in Section 270 of the Peace Corps Manual, which provides, in relevant part:

...

6.0 Site Development and Monitoring

The quality of a Volunteer's site, housing, and work assignment is a critical feature of a safe Volunteer experience. Each post must ensure that Volunteer sites, housing, and work assignments are appropriate and meet all Peace Corps and post-established criteria.

6.1 Site Development Process

Each post must establish and apply a process for developing, selecting, and approving sites that meet the criteria set forth in this manual section. *See sections 6.2 – 6.6.*

6.2 Site Selection Criteria

Each post must develop and apply criteria for the selection and approval of sites. Criteria should address work role, potential for integration, living arrangements, vulnerability to natural disasters, communication, transportation, access to essential health care and other support services, security climate, and consent of host authorities. Also, each post must review the site history, if there is any. Evaluation of the site and satisfaction of site selection criteria must be documented by the post.

6.3 Housing Standards
All V/T housing or host family arrangements must be inspected by post staff (or a trained designee) prior to occupancy to ensure each house and/or homestay arrangement meets all minimum standards as established by the Peace Corps and the post. Reports of the inspections must be documented and maintained by the post.

6.4 Community Orientation

Each post must provide host communities, host families, counterparts, and local officials with an appropriate orientation in order to promote more welcoming communities, more supportive counterparts and authorities, and better-defined roles.

6.5 Volunteer Site Visits

Each post must establish protocols and schedules for periodic staff visits with Volunteers in their sites to monitor and address issues related to work assignments, living arrangements, adaptation, and security. Reports of visits must be documented and maintained by the post.

6.6 Site History Documentation

Each post must maintain a system for recording the history of a site from the time that initial evaluation begins. The site history must also capture security issues that could affect future Volunteer placements in particular areas. Information should include Volunteer concerns about a location, safety or security incidents that occur in the community, and other conditions that could otherwise affect a future decision to place a Volunteer in that location.

The Peace Corps regularly reevaluates the placement of Volunteers based on safety and security considerations, among other factors.

19. The Peace Corps' Consolidated Incident Reporting System (CIRS) is designed to ensure the agency responds appropriately to victims of crime and to allow the agency to improve training and modify programming to enhance the safety of all Volunteers. The Peace Corps' definitions of crimes are derived from the FBI's Uniform Crime Report and the National Incident-Based Reporting System.

The Peace Corps is committed to treating all sexual assaults seriously and to providing all victims of sexual assault with the support they need, regardless of how the incident was classified. In order to help provide our safety and security staff with greater detail about the kinds of sexual assaults experienced by Volunteers, for internal purposes we distinguish between "rapes," "major sexual assaults" and "other sexual assaults." They are defined as follows:

Rape: Penetration of the vagina or anus with a penis, tongue, finger, or object without the consent and/or against the will of the Volunteer. This includes when a victim is unable to give consent because of ingestion of drug and/or alcohol. Rape also includes forced oral sex, where:

- the victim's mouth contacts the offender's genital or anus, OR
- the offender's mouth contacts the victim's genital or anus, OR
- the victim is forced to perform oral sex on another person.

Any unsuccessful attempts to penetrate the vagina or anus are also classified as rape.

Major sexual assault: Intentional or forced contact with the victim's breasts, genitals, mouth, buttocks, or anus OR disrobing of the Volunteer or offender without contact of the Volunteer's aforementioned body parts, for sexual gratification AND any of the following:

- the use of a weapon by the offender, OR
- physical injury to the victim, OR
- when the victim has to use *substantial* force to disengage the offender.

Other sexual assault: Unwanted or forced kissing, fondling, and/or groping of the breasts, genitals, mouth, buttocks, or anus for sexual gratification.

The category of "other sexual assault" includes conduct that might not be charged as a crime of sexual assault in the United States. We recognize that certain kinds of behavior can have harmful effects on our Volunteers, regardless of whether the incident would legally be considered a sexual assault in the United States. When anything bad happens to a Volunteer, we want to know about it.

The *Annual Report of Volunteer Safety* is based on data collected through CIRS. It does not include data derived separately from the anonymous Annual Volunteer Survey (AVS) but it does rely on the AVS data to come up with statistics on underreporting.

20. The Peace Corps considers the responses of Volunteers in the Annual Volunteer Survey (AVS) to be important in evaluating the effectiveness of programs. Both the June 2010 *Comprehensive Agency Assessment* and the portfolio review process put in place as a result of the Assessment were based, in part, on AVS responses.

The Peace Corps carefully reviews Volunteer responses. For example, in early 2010, based upon results of the 2009 AVS, special assessments of medical care were conducted at a number of Peace Corps posts, and appropriate actions, including PCMO corrective action plans and terminations, were taken to improve medical care for Volunteers.

21. In 2010, the Peace Corps changed its procedure for selecting, managing and supervising Peace Corps Medical Officers. The Associate Director for Volunteer Support (or his designee) who is a medical doctor is now responsible for the overall management and supervision of Peace Corps Medical Officers. Country Directors are responsible for the day-to-day supervision and management of Peace Corps Medical Officers on non-clinical issues only. While Country Director input is taken into account, Peace Corps Medical Officers are selected by the Associate Director for Volunteer Support. This selection process carried out by the Associate Director for Volunteer Support includes a review of the applicants' credentials and experience, as well as interviews.

The position of Director of the Office of Medical Services is a full-time position and the person filling that position does not occupy other positions at the agency.

22. Under Peace Corps Manual Section 218, "[a]ll transit houses must be established and managed by the Peace Corps post." Volunteer Wardens do not have formal roles to play with respect to transit houses.

Supervision of Volunteers, work assignments and site selection are addressed in Peace Corps Manual Section 270. Among other matters, Manual Section 270 requires each post to establish a system to collect Volunteer whereabouts and contact information when Volunteers are away from their communities for personal travel, annual leave, or official reasons. The Safety and Security Coordinators at post are responsible for, among other things, ensuring compliance with Manual Section 270. Peace Corps Safety and Security Officers also do periodic reviews to ensure compliance with Manual Section 270, as does the OIG.

Responses of Peace Corps Director Aaron S. Williams

To Questions for the Record

Submitted by Representative Christopher H. Smith

House Committee on Foreign Affairs

Hearing: "Peace Corps at 50"

Information regarding rapes/attempted rapes and major sexual assaults that occurred in 2009 and 2010:

1. Of those arrests made, what percentage resulted in convictions?
   38.5%

2. Of those convictions, what percentage resulted in prison sentences?
   93.3% (in the lone case not resulting in a prison sentence, traditional justice was imposed)

3. Of those individuals who received a prison sentence, were there any who failed to commence their sentence or who were released prior to the completion of their sentence as of the date of this hearing?
   We know of no cases in which perpetrators failed to commence their sentence or were released prior to the completion of their sentence. We are aware of only one case in which a sentence was reduced upon appeal.

4. Please identify the countries in which,
   a. Arrests were not made following the filing of a police report
      Peru

      Rwanda

      Albania

      Mozambique

      Kenya

      Dominican Republic

      Armenia

   b. Arrests did not result in convictions:
      Rwanda

      Lesotho

c. Convictions did not result in prison sentences:
Fiji (traditional justice imposed in lieu of prison sentence)

d. Convicted individuals were released prior to the completion of their prison sentences:
We know of no cases in which perpetrators failed to commence their sentence or were released prior to the completion of their sentence.

The Honorable Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11)

Peace Corps at 50
Wednesday, May 11, 2011
9:30am

I truly wish that our witnesses were testifying under different circumstances. Ms. Smochek, Ms. Clark, Dr. Koenen, Ms. Puzey: the harrowing ordeals which you have experienced are unconscionable. I commend you for testifying before the Committee today. Your presence here is a testament to your courage, to your refusal to be a silent victim. Ms. Puzey—I'm so sorry you lost your daughter Kate. She was so brave that some cowardly criminal murdered her for speaking out about this very issue—rape.

There is one way to prevent rape and sexual assault—to ensure that rapists don't rape. The onus is not on the victim, and I refuse to go down the road of "what if." Rape and sexual assault are ubiquitous—even war correspondents can be targets, as recent accounts show us. As I said, I refuse to go down the road of "what could the victims have done differently?"

What we're here to focus on is the Peace Corps, and steps that the organization has taken and can take to protect those who serve as Peace Corps Volunteers. In examining the Peace Corps' current view of volunteer safety, we could list the reforms that Director Williams has undertaken, such as: training overseas staff in how to respond appropriately when Volunteers bring allegations of wrongdoing, improving the medical care provided to Volunteers, and revising notification procedures for serious incidents. We could also examine the formalization of the agency's existing practice of sending a Peace Corps staff member to be with the family of a fallen Volunteer within 24 hours of the notification of the death of the Volunteer. Moreover, we could list the myriad bureaucratic reforms, such as detailing the procedures posts must follow in order to respond promptly and effectively to an assault, and tasking the agency's Sexual Assault Working Group with developing a comprehensive sexual assault prevention and response program.

But none of those reforms undo the wrongs that were committed against Ms. Smochek, Ms. Clark, Dr. Koenen, Kate Puzey, and the countless other sexual assault survivors who served in the Peace Corps.

As a supporter of the Peace Corps and the wonderful mission its Volunteers facilitate, it is difficult to read about what happened to these Volunteers. All of us would argue that an organization that attracts such positive, talented, compassionate people must redouble its efforts to reduce risk and provide compassionate care and service to victims and their families. We know further that given the far-flung and challenging nature of the Peace Corps mission, we can reduce but not eliminate all risk for Volunteers.

Our Peace Corps Volunteers are the key asset of the program. I await today's testimony from Director Williams about what steps he is undertaking to ensure the safety and compassionate care of all Peace Corps Volunteers.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Honorable Niki Tsongas
Statement for the Record
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Full Committee Hearing: "Peace Corps at 50"
May 10, 2011

I would like to take this opportunity to commend Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen and Ranking Member Berman for holding this important hearing and giving me and others the opportunity to share our views about the subject of sexual assault in the Peace Corps.

I strongly support the Peace Corps program. My late husband Paul Tsongas served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ethiopia from 1962–1964, and as Peace Corps Country Director in the West Indies in 1967 and 1968. He went on to become the first former Peace Corps volunteer to be elected to the U.S. Senate. Our daughter Ashley served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Madagascar.

Through their experiences, and others, I have learned that the Peace Corps program is life-changing for many. Volunteers have helped countless individuals around the world who are building a better life for themselves, and in doing so, have fostered a better understanding of Americans. Likewise, their experiences have also helped Peace Corps volunteers better understand the places and people they serve.

Recently, we all read with great concern the news stories reporting tragic stories of sexual assaults against Peace Corps volunteers. Peace Corps volunteers brave many challenges during their service, and we are here today to discuss how we can strengthen the Peace Corps and ensure that volunteers have the support and resources they need. Volunteers deserve to be treated with dignity, empowerment, and respect in the event that they are a victim of a crime like sexual assault. And, addressing these challenges will strengthen the Peace Corps as an institution and make it a program in which more Americans will want to participate.

Since becoming a member of the Armed Services Committee, I learned about the alarming incidence of sexual assault in the military and have introduced legislation to better protect servicemembers and enact changes that will both prevent this crime and require the military to respond to it in a way that upholds the rights of servicemembers. The experience of introducing legislation and working with the committee on this issue has helped me understand some of the common themes that surface when individuals are victimized by sexual assault and then find themselves having to navigate a large institution such as the military or the Peace Corps.

One of the challenges I have come across when confronting this crime is that victims of sexual assault often face blame for their victimization. This is one of very few crimes, if not the only crime, where a victim's intentions and actions are scrutinized and questioned following an assault. What a victim was doing and wearing when the assault took place, for example, is often brought up in the aftermath, whether it's by a first responder, lawyer, or in the case of the Peace Corps, a Country Director or Security Officer. Moving away from a culture of blame to one in which victims are treated with dignity and respect, and where they are given the benefit of the doubt is an important first step in dealing with this issue.

Another challenge is that victims of sexual assault are often dismissed or not believed. Affidavits from current and former Peace Corps volunteers unfortunately reinforce this reality. Current and former volunteers have stated, "The Peace Corps seemed to defend or dismiss my attacker because admitting his crime would be a liability." "I spoke to the in-country Peace Corps director about my case. I said I wanted to prosecute and he said 'It's your word against his. He said you wanted to have sex and we believe him.'" "I went back to the Peace Corps' office that weekend and reported [I] fe[lt] unsafe and threatened by my host father. Again, I was not taken seriously... I was told that moving to a new host family was not an option."

We've also seen that victims of sexual assault often experience a lack of confidentiality, and lose control of what happens to their case once it is reported. The stigma that is associated with being a victim of sexual assault makes it imperative that victims are able to decide who finds out about their assault or their identity. A former Peace Corps volunteer stated, "I refused to label it a sexual assault after I was shown the flow chart of who had to be contacted... following a sexual assault. There were no fewer than 15 people on that list, many of whom I had no confidence in."

These realities reflect an attitude that has the negative effect of deterring volunteers from reporting the crime, and for those who do, being re-victimized by the process of reporting an assault. The 2010 annual volunteer survey revealed that nearly 40% of rape victims, 44% of victims of attempted rape, and nearly 50% of sexual assault victims did not report their attacks. As with our Armed Forces, it is in the best interest of the Peace Corps to encourage victims to report a sexual assault and to take those reports seriously. Confronting sexual assault openly and honestly will make both our military and the Peace Corps stronger.

We have found that one of the most important first steps to addressing this problem is to protect a victim's right to privacy. The lack of control over personal decision-making after reporting an assault is a common theme from both former servicemembers and former Peace Corps volunteers, and often discourages victims from reporting an attack or assault. Putting in place a system which allows victims to report an assault while also maintaining their confidentiality could bring some of the victims out of the shadows. Consulting with victims on how to proceed once an assault is reported, for example, and determining whether the volunteer should transfer to a new station, would give victims more faith in the system and encourage more volunteers to report these tragic incidents.

Similarly, my experience with Military Sexual Trauma suggests that it is critical that victims have reliable, accessible Victim Advocates. Victim Advocates play a unique role as their job is to help a victim cope with assault. They help victims access the resources that they need, navigate the legal and health care system, and serve as their advocate. At times, this means they may be at odds with others inside their institution in order to best defend the interests of the victim.

I commend the Peace Corps for hiring a Victim Advocate who will be housed in the Peace Corps headquarters to provide guidance to the organization on how to improve its sexual assault prevention and response programs and provide assistance to victims. This Victim Advocate will be an important resource for the Peace Corps leadership. This is another important first step, and

I hope the Peace Corps is also considering more accessible, regional Victim Advocates who would be available to assist volunteers in the field. My experience with the Armed Forces suggests that independent regional Victim Advocates can best serve victims and best serve the Peace Corps. When this role is assigned to staff with other duties or responsibilities in a country or region, such as a Security or Medical officer, or Country Director, it can present that individual with conflicts of interest if they have to report to someone on staff of whom they may have to be critical. Furthermore, the demands on an individual serving multiple roles may mean that a victim has to compete for their time.

Many of the Peace Corps volunteers who have told their stories indicate their cases were mishandled by the staff in the country or region where they were assigned. In the aftermath of their assault, they were forced to be their own advocate while coping with a serious trauma. Regionally accessible Victim Advocates could significantly improve these situations.

Third, my experience working with the Armed Forces suggests that standardized, worldwide trainings for staff and volunteers and a single policy for how to respond to reports of sexual assault are critical. Training is most effective when it includes widely-recognized best practices for sexual assault prevention and response and focuses both on minimizing risk of assault and on the rights of those who serve.

These rights should be in accordance with the rights and protections recognized in the United States for victims of sexual assault. Though volunteers may serve in countries where, for example, rape is not recognized as a crime or where women are of a lower status than men, these cultural differences should not influence the way Peace Corps volunteers are treated by Peace Corps staff, regardless of their country of origin.

I applaud the Peace Corps leadership for responding proactively on this issue. It is clear that it has devoted significant time and resources to improving processes and policies on sexual assault. I look forward to working with you to ensure that all Peace Corps staff is held to a high standard in the way they respond to victims of assault.

We owe a great debt to anyone who is harmed while they are serving our country. We may never be able to eradicate crimes in other countries where our volunteers work, but we *can* change the way our institutions respond to them. These improvements will strengthen the Peace Corps and guarantee its success for years to come.

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to provide my views on this issue and I look forward to continuing to work to improve the experience of all Peace Corps volunteers. Thank you, Madam Chairman and Ranking Member Berman.

Written Statement from the

International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies

for the

House Foreign Affairs Committee

On

Peace Corps at 50

May 11, 2011

On behalf of more than 2000 members of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS), we thank you for holding this important hearing to discuss the critical issues of safety and security of U.S. Peace Corps volunteers. ISTSS is the premier society of professionals dedicated to the discovery and dissemination of knowledge about traumatic stressors and their immediate and long-term consequences. Our membership includes psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, nurses, counselors, researchers, administrators, advocates, journalists, clergy, and others with an interest in the study and treatment of traumatic stress. ISTSS members are among the world's leading experts on various forms of trauma, including sexual assault. As such we appreciate the opportunity to share our thoughts regarding this important public health problem with members of this Committee.

Sexual Assault in the Peace Corps and the General U.S. Population

There are several key points that Congress should consider as it determines how to address the problem of sexual assault among Peace Corps volunteers. First, sexual assault is a prevalent problem among U.S. women in the general population as well as among U.S. female higher education students. A recent research project funded by the National Institute of Justice found that 18.0% of a national household probability sample of U.S. women age 18 and older had been raped during their lifetime and that 11.5% of U.S. female higher education students had been raped (Kilpatrick, Ruggiero, Conoscenti, & McCauley, 2007). When these sample estimates were generalized to the populations of U.S. adult women and female higher education students, the authors of this study estimated that over 20 million out of 112 million adult women in the U.S. and 673,000 out of nearly 6 million female higher education students in the U.S. had been raped. It was also estimated that over one million adult women in the U.S. and 300,000 female higher education students in the U.S. were raped during the past year. These estimates do not include attempted rapes or other forms of sexual assault, so the number of women experiencing any type of sexual assault would have been far higher than the estimates for rape alone. Therefore, it is clear that sexual assault is a prevalent problem for women in America.

Next, there is reason to believe that Peace Corps statistics on rape and other types of sexual assault substantially underestimate the extent of the problem. The primary source for information about rape and other types of sexual assault among Peace Corps volunteers is provided in the Peace Corps Annual Report on Volunteer Safety, which provides statistics on cases of these crimes that were officially reported to the agency. The latest report, *Safety of the Volunteer 2009*, indicated that 15 rapes/attempted rapes, 20 major sexual assaults, and 76 other sexual assaults were reported to the agency during 2009 (Peace Corps, 2010a). The total number of all sexual assaults reported to the Peace Corps in 2009 was 111. These statistics on reported cases do not include rape and other sexual assault cases that Peace Corps volunteers did not report to authorities.

The Peace Corps collects additional information about rape and other types of sexual assault experiences of volunteers from its Annual Volunteer Survey that includes questions about personal safety (Peace Corps, 2010b). The 2010 survey is not clear on whether the reference period for personal attacks is the year 2010, the past year, or ever. It also fails to provide a breakout for rapes and other sexual assaults against female versus male volunteers. Volunteers disclosed having experienced 17 rapes, 28 attempted rapes, and 213 other types of sexual assaults. Without more information about the time period covered by the survey and a

breakdown of cases among female versus male volunteers, it is impossible to determine how many of these cases occurred among female versus male volunteers or how this survey estimate of cases compares with the cases officially reported by women to the Peace Corps. Moreover, a comparison of the survey questions used to measure rape and other types of sexual assault with those demonstrated to be "state-of-the-science" (Fisher, 2009; Kilpatrick, 2004) suggests that the Volunteer Survey likely did not capture many rape and sexual assault cases. Even without better data, it is evident that the incidence of rape and other types of sexual assault in the Peace Corps is unacceptably high.

Finally, a considerable amount is known about why women are reluctant to report rapes to authorities, including rape-related concerns that are likely to deter their willingness to report (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner, 2003; Wolitzky-Taylor, et al., 2010). Primary concerns include not being believed and being blamed. Given these concerns, it is reasonable to assume that a victim's expectations about how she would be treated if she were to report the crime or what types of services she would receive would impact her willingness to report. Clearly, creating an organizational environment in which victims are believed, supported, and offered services should improve women's willingness to report. If properly implemented, the Peace Corps' newly stated policy outlined in its Commitment to Sexual Assault Victims (2011) would mark an important step toward establishing such a supportive organizational environment.

Consequences of Sexual Assault

The physical, psychological, and social consequences of sexual trauma are potentially vast and long-lasting. Physical consequences of sexual assault include: chronic pain, gastrointestinal disorders, gynecological complications, migraines/headaches, and disability that prevents work (Jewkes, Sen, & Garcia-Moreno, 2002). More than 32,000 pregnancies result from rape every year (Holmes et al., 1996). There are also increased rates of death following sexual violence that may be a result of suicide, HIV infection, or homicide (Jewkes, Sen, & Garcia-Moreno, 2002).

Psychological effects of sexual violence include posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other anxiety symptoms (Martin, Macy, & Young, 2011; Resnick, Kilpatrick, Dansky, Saunders, & Best, 1993), depression (Kilpatrick, et al., 2003), suicide attempts (Ullman, 2004; Waldrop et al., 2007) and drug/substance use (Hedtke et al., 2008). In fact, according to the 2002 World Health Organization's *World report on violence and health*, victims of sexual assault are three times more likely to suffer from depression, six times more likely to suffer from PTSD, thirteen times more likely to abuse alcohol, twenty-six times more likely to abuse drugs, and four times more likely to contemplate suicide.

Rape is among the most virulent and powerful types of experiences known to result in PTSD. Surveys indicate that 25% of women who have experienced sexual assault have PTSD at the time of interview. Moreover, symptoms of PTSD can wax and wane over the years. Indeed, PTSD can develop years after an event so that, from a lifetime perspective, 63% of women who have experienced a sexual assault will develop PTSD at some point in their lives (Resnick et al., 1993).

Victims report negative reactions and perceptions among friends, families and professionals expected to help them, which can lead to feelings of shame as well as disengagement in family,

social and professional relationships (Filipas & Ullman, 2001; Wilson, Drozdek, & Turkovic, 2006). Sexual violence affects the survivors' social functioning, leading to strained relationships with family, friends, and intimate partners. Sexual assault is associated with reduced contact with friends and relatives and with lower likelihood of marriage (Golding, Wilsnack, & Cooper, 2002; Sarkar & Sarkar, 2005). Further, the economic impact of sexual assault, excluding child sexual abuse, is estimated at $127 billion a year to the U.S. population (Miller, Cohen, & Wersema, 1996). It is estimated that each rape costs approximately $151,423 due to medical and mental health services and lost productivity (DeLisi, 2010).

Treatment for Sexual Assault

Still, despite the horrors of sexual assault, there are several things that can be done to protect against or to reduce its often long-term effects. Social support provided by friends, partners, families and communities, and other trauma survivors in the aftermath of a sexual assault, as in other types of traumatic event, can make a critical difference in promoting recovery (Charuvastra & Cloitre, 2008). In addition, there are several mental health interventions that are highly effective in reducing or resolving PTSD and other problems such as anxiety and depression. The large majority of these are cognitive behavioral therapies that focus on reviewing and revising negative beliefs about oneself and others (e.g., safety, shame and guilt) that have developed as a result of the sexual assault. They include therapies such as Prolonged Exposure, Cognitive Processing Therapy, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, and Stress Inoculation Training (see ISTSS Treatment Guidelines, Foa et al., 2009). In addition, there are therapies that help women regain or develop even stronger skills in managing stress and facing life challenges such as Stress Inoculation Therapy (see ISTSS Treatment Guidelines). Lastly, it is not unusual for women to develop significant problems other than PTSD as a result of rape such as Major Depression, eating disorders and other anxiety disorders. Effective treatments focusing specifically on these problems are also available.

Even though there are many effective treatments available for PTSD and other mental health problems associated with sexual assault, the key to getting good treatment is having appropriate screening and referral to effective treatment when needed. Unfortunately, screening and referral is often unavailable to survivors. It is critical that prompt screening and treatment be available to survivors of sexual assault, both in the Peace Corps and the general population, to ensure opportunities for timely recovery.

In summary, ISTSS would like to offer five specific recommendations for the Committee's consideration.

Recommendation 1: Better data are clearly needed to establish the magnitude, nature and impact of rape and other types of sexual assault among Peace Corps volunteers. Therefore, we recommend that the Peace Corps commission an independent survey of past and present volunteers using state-of-the-art screening questions, gathering information on formal reporting and reasons for non-reporting, measuring the potential mental health impact of sexual assault, and collecting data about the use of and potential barriers to the utilization of victim assistance and mental health services.

Recommendation 2: The Peace Corps should develop and disseminate evidence-based educational information about sexual assault and its consequences for volunteers, victims, victim assistance professionals, administrators and staff, and mental health professionals. Tendencies to blame the victim rather than the perpetrator of the crime must be corrected. Education concerning the adverse effects of "victim blaming" attitudes and behaviors on the recovery of the victim should be emphasized. Such information will help these groups understand the crime, its consequences for victims, the assistance victims need, and where the assistance can be obtained.

Recommendation 3: In order to increase the Peace Corps volunteers' access to and utilization of effective services, the Peace Corps should consider developing methods to deliver information and services to victims of rape and other types of sexual assault via the web and/or evidence-based mental health assessment or counseling services via tele-mental health methods.

Recommendation 4: The Peace Corps should incorporate regular monitoring of perceived safety and potential incidences of sexual assault or violence among its volunteers during their period of service. This may allow the Peace Corps to implement targeted preventive measures as appropriate, as well as to provide more timely administration of victim assistance and mental health services as indicated (O'Neill & Kramer, 2001).

Recommendation 5: The Peace Corps and other appropriate related authorities should ensure that the perpetrators of rape and sexual assault are brought to justice, and that the justice processes be reparative to the victims (Danieli, 2009).

In closing, the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies would like to thank you for the opportunity to share our comments as you consider issues of safety and security in the Peace Corps. We appreciate the Committee's ongoing commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of Peace Corps volunteers. Our organization stands ready to assist the Peace Corps, its volunteers, and the Committee on this critical issue.

References

Charuvastra, A., & Cloitre, M. (2008). Social bonds and posttraumatic stress disorder. *Annual Review of Psychology, 59*, 301-328.

Danieli, Y. (2009). Massive trauma and the healing role of reparative justice. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 22*, 351-357.

Delisi, M. (2010). Murder by numbers: Monetary costs imposed by a sample of homicide offenders. *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology, 21*, 501-513.

Filipas, H., & Ullman, S. (2001). Social reaction to sexual assault victims from various support sources. *Violence and Victims, 16*, 673-692.

Fisher, B.S. (2009). The effects of survey question wording on rape estimates: Evidence from a quasi-experimental design. *Violence against Women, 15,* 133-147.

Fisher, B.S., Daigle, L.E., Cullen, F.T., & Turner, M.E. (2003). Reporting sexual victimization to the police and others: Results from a national-level study of college women. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 30,* 6-38.

Golding, J.M., Wilsnack, S.C., & Cooper, M.L. (2002). Sexual assault history and social support: six general population studies. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 15*(3), 187-197.

Hedtke, K., Ruggiero, K., Fitzgerald, M., Zinzow, H., Saunders, B., Resnick, H., & Kilpatrick, D. (2008). A longitudinal investigation of interpersonal violence in relation to mental health and substance use. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 76,* 633-647.

Holmes, M.M., Resnick, H.S., Kilpatrick, D.G., & Best, C.L. (1996). Rape-related pregnancy: Estimates and descriptive characteristics from a national sample of women. *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology, 175,* 320-324.

Foa, E.B., Keane, T.M., Friedman, M.J., & Cohen, J.A. (2009). Effective Treatments for PTSD: Practice Guidelines from the International Society of Traumatic Stress Studies. New York: Guilford Press.

Jewkes, R., Sen, P., Garcia-Moreno, C. (2002). Sexual violence. In: E. Krug, L. Dahlberg, J. Mercy et al., (Eds.), *World Report on Violence and Health* (pp. 213–239). Geneva: World Health Organization.

Kilpatrick, D., Ruggiero, K., Acierno, R., Saunders, B., Resnick, H., & Best, C. (2003). Violence and risk of PTSD, major depression, substance abuse/dependence, and comorbidity: Results from the National Survey of Adolescents. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 71,* 692-700.

Kilpatrick, D.G. (2004). What is violence against women? Defining and measuring the problem. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 19,* 1209-1234.

Kilpatrick, D.G., Resnick, H.S., Ruggiero, K.J., Conoscenti, L.M., & McCauley, J. (2007). Drug-facilitated, Incapacitated, and Forcible Rape: A National Study. Final report submitted to the National Institute of Justice, May 2007, NCJ 219181.

Martin, S., Macy, R., & Young, S. (2011). Health and economic consequences of sexual violence. In J. White, M. Koss & A. Kazdin (Eds.), *Violence against women and children, Vol 1: Mapping the terrain* (pp.173-195). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Miller, T., Cohen, M., & Wiersema, B. (1996). Victim costs and consequences: A new look. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justices, U.S. Department of Justice.

O'Neill, M.O., & Kramer, E. (2002). The Peace Corps Volunteer Safety Support System. In Y. Danieli (Ed.), *Sharing the front line and the back hills: International protectors and provides, peacekeepers, humanitarian aid workers and the media in the midst of crisis* (pp.157-160). Published for and on behalf of the United Nations. Amityville, New York: Baywood Publishing Company Inc.

Peace Corps. (2010a). *Safety of the Volunteer 2009.* Washington, DC: Author.

Peace Corps. (2010b). *Peace Corps Volunteer 2009 Annual Volunteer Survey: Global Report.* Washington, DC: Author.

Peace Corps. (2011). Commitment to Sexual Assault Victims. Retrieved from http://multimedia.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/pdf/documents/Commitment%20to%20Sexual%20Assault%20Victims.pdf

Resnick, H.S., Kilpatrick, D.G., Dansky, B.S., Sanders, B.E., & Best, C.L. 1993. Prevalence of civilian trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder in a representative national sample of women. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 61*, 984–91.

Sarkar, N., & Sarkar, R. (2005). Sexual assault on woman: Its impact on her life and living in society. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy, 20*, 407-419.

Ullman, S.E. (2004). Sexual assault victimization and suicidal behavior in women: A review of the literature. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 9,* 331–351.

Waldrop, A.E., Hanson, R.F., Resnick, H.S., Kilpatrick, D.G., Naugle, A.E., & Saunders, B.E. (2007). Risk factors for suicidal behaviors among a national sample of adolescents: Implications for prevention. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 20,* 869–879.

Wilson, J.P., Drozdek, B., & Turkovic, S. (2006). Posttraumatic shame and guilt. *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse, 7*(2), 122-141.

Wolitzky-Taylor, K.B., Resnick, H.S., McCauley, J.L., Amstadter, A.B., Kilpatrick, D.G., & Ruggiero, K.J. (2011). Is reporting of rape on the rise? A comparison of women with reported versus unreported rape experiences in the National Women's Study-Replication. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 26,* 807-832.

○