

Remarks on the 35th Anniversary of the Peace Corps June 19, 1996

Thank you. Mandy, where are your family? Stand up there. Let's give them a hand. [*Applause*] Thank you very much. You did a good job there. Thank you very much.

To Sargent and Eunice Shriver, thank you so much for the Peace Corps, for the Special Olympics, for everything you have done for America and for the world. Senator Wofford, thank you for the Peace Corps and for national service and for everything that happened in between. Thank you, Mark Gearan, for proving that there is life after the White House. [*Laughter*] To all the former volunteers who are here, to the distinguished Members of Congress, to Ambassador Spio-Garbrah, thank you, sir, we're honored by your presence and by our friendship with your country.

The Peace Corps for 35 years has shown America at its best. In the summer of 1961, as has been said, there were 80 young Americans standing where these Americans stand today. Wearing their Sunday best, they waited excitedly to meet President Kennedy, and I understand they were chatting occasionally among themselves in Twi, the language they would have to use more frequently as they moved along. [*Laughter*] More than half of them were preparing to leave for Ghana, about to launch one of the greatest experiments in service to humanity in all human history. They would live as the people of Ghana lived and be active as a part of the communities they served. They were trained to teach, but they were going to learn and to bridge the gaps of development and custom with sturdy bonds of friendship and compassion.

On that day, President Kennedy said, "The future of the Peace Corps really rests with you. If you do well, then the Peace Corps will be developed, and more and more Americans will go abroad, and we will find a greater and greater response to serving our country." The men and women of "Ghana I" did the President, the Peace Corps, and America proud. I am very grateful to all of you, and I'm glad to have you back in the Rose Garden today, 35 years later.

When President Kennedy created the Peace Corps 35 years ago with the extraordinary sup-

port of Sargent Shriver, Harris Wofford, Ted Sorenson, and many others, he tapped an overflowing reservoir of energy and idealism. Thousands of young people answered the call to serve at the vanguard of the New Frontier. Among the first was the Vice President's beloved sister, Nancy Gore Hunger. They gave of themselves to help others around the world to become the best they could be and to bring to them the message by the example of their lives that our Nation is a great country standing for great ideals, a country that cares about human progress everywhere in the world.

The Peace Corps symbolized everything that inspired my generation to service. It was based on a simple yet powerful idea, that none of us alone will ever be as strong as we can all be if we'll all work together. None of us can reach our fullest potential while others are left behind. Community counts, and every member of our community matters at home and on this increasingly small planet we share.

Since 1961, as Mark said, more than 140,000 Americans have served as Peace Corps volunteers. Today the Peace Corps' towering task is just as vital as ever. I am very grateful for those who serve today. And their mission is just as important today as it was 35 years ago. Even as we meet, the Peace Corps is hard at work in countries few could have imagined going to back in 1961. Indeed, the Peace Corps is hard at work today in countries that did not exist in 1961. It has traced the rising tide of freedom to meet new needs around the globe from Central America to Central Europe to Central Asia, sharing the skills of private enterprise in nations struggling to build a market economy, empowering women, protecting the environment, and always showing others the path to help themselves.

I'm proud to say that in April, after an absence of nearly 5 years, Peace Corps volunteers returned to Haiti to help the Haitian people make the most of their hard-won freedom. Just a couple of days ago, the First Lady and I had the honor to welcome to the White House for a brief visit former President Aristide and his wife. And he talked in glowing terms about the citizenship of the Americans who have come

to help Haiti, from those who came in uniform, including 200 Haitian-Americans who could speak Creole to the people of Haiti, to the Peace Corps volunteers who labor there today.

With the agreement that the Vice President signed last December, as has already been said, our Peace Corps volunteers will go this year to serve in South Africa for the first time. They must be so excited. So many others have gone before them, but they can prove—they can prove—that South Africa can make its dreams and its promise real.

I'm also proud to announce the establishment of a Crisis Corps within the Peace Corps to help the relief community to cope with international emergencies. It will draw on the Peace Corps' recent successful experience in helping people affected by disasters, such as rebuilding homes in Antigua that were destroyed by Hurricane Luis and helping Rwandan refugees to grow their own food.

The dedicated service of Peace Corps volunteers does not end when their 2-year tour is over. Today, returned Peace Corps volunteers, as has been said, are making a difference in our administration, in the Cabinet, like Secretary Shalala, or those on Capitol Hill who have already been introduced. And I want to thank them all, Republicans and Democrats alike. I wish we had them up here explaining what the role of their service in the Peace Corps was in animating their future careers in public service. There are many leaders in journalism, in business, in education, including many who are here today. Thousands of volunteers just serve in their communities today or offer their time to teach schoolchildren about the world in which they live, in which they, the volunteers, were fortunate enough to explore at an earlier time in their lives.

Their spirit of service is the spirit of America. In that sense, it's more than 35 years old; it's as old as our country itself. And I can't help but note that not all our 140,000 Peace Corps volunteers have been so young. They just had to be young at heart, young in spirit, young in imagination. And thank you, sir, for making me feel that I might have a future in the Peace Corps. [*Laughter*] I'm glad to see you. Thank you.

We all remember the legendary mother of former President Carter and her wonderful stories of how the Peace Corps changed her life.

The Peace Corps is for all Americans who wish to serve.

When I became President we challenged America to rekindle that spirit of service. I thank Senator Wofford for working to support the creation of AmeriCorps in 1993, to give young people a chance to serve their country here at home, and for doing more by running the Corporation for National Service today. Americans now—in addition to the 140,000 who have worked in the Peace Corps, we've had 40,000 young Americans lifting their own lives by giving comfort and support to dealing with problems here in the United States.

Last month when I spoke at Penn State, I asked our people to further spread the ethic of service throughout our Nation. I asked America's institutions of higher education to use more of their work-study money to promote community service here at home. And I challenge every community to get our students to answer the call of service. With our help, a year from now we want service scholars to be honored at every high school graduation in America. We have to take the spirit of the Peace Corps into the lives of every young person in this country. Every citizen needs to know that we give and we get, that we grow by giving and serving.

So let us always remember that the truest measure of the Peace Corps' greatness has been more than its impact on development. The real gift of the Peace Corps is the gift of the human heart, pulsing with the spirit of civic responsibility that is the core of America's character. It is forever an antidote to cynicism, a living challenge to intolerance, an enduring promise that the future can be better and that people can live richer lives if we have the faith and strength and compassion and good sense to work together.

Thank you all for making that live in our country, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:14 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Amanda Jackson, volunteer, and Mark Gearan, Director, Peace Corps; R. Sargent Shriver, first Peace Corps Director, and his wife, Eunice, founder, Special Olympics; Ambassador Ekwow Spio-Garbrah of Ghana; Theodore C. Sorenson, Special Counsel to President John F. Kennedy; and Jean-Bertrand Aristide, former President of Haiti, and his wife, Mildred.