

**ASSESSING THE SAFETY AND SECURITY  
OF PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH CONGRESS**

SECOND SESSION

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JUNE 22, 2004  
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## **ASSESSING THE SAFETY AND SECURITY OF PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS**

**Tuesday, June 22, 2004**

UNITED STATES SENATE,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,  
*Washington, D.C.*

The committee met at 9:34 a.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Norm Coleman, presiding.  
Present: Senators Coleman, Voinovich, and Dodd.

### **OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. NORM COLEMAN, U.S. SENATOR FROM MINNESOTA**

Senator COLEMAN. This hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

Today's hearing will examine the safety of Americans serving overseas as Peace Corps volunteers.

Let me state from the outset I believe the Peace Corps is American diplomacy at its best. In a world where America is too often misunderstood, the Peace Corps represents an opportunity to show the compassionate nature of this country and its citizens. Now, more than ever, we need the Peace Corps to continue fostering international goodwill at the grassroots level.

That is why I am proud to support the President's initiative to double the size of the Peace Corps and will continue to press for adequate funding to do so.

Unfortunately, we have seen again in recent weeks the desire of some people to harm Americans. The world is a vastly different place than it was in 1961 when President Kennedy founded the Peace Corps. Americans abroad face different security risks today than they did 43 years ago.

Director Vasquez has told the committee that the safety and security of Peace Corps volunteers is his number one priority, and I applaud that focus. Under his leadership, the Peace Corps has established an Office of Safety and Security, including field-based safety and security officers and a compliance officer to ensure adherence to safety measures.

This hearing is designed to examine the effectiveness of recent initiatives to improve volunteer safety and to consider proposals to further protect Peace Corps volunteers. In particular, I have asked witnesses to discuss the frequency of site visits by country directors, oversight of volunteer living quarters, and the availability of self-defense and other safety training. I am interested to know if there are better ways to employ technology such as cell phones and satellite phones to keep volunteers safe and deal with incidents

once they occur. I also want to hear about the specific threats which single female volunteers face.

I would like to emphasize the active involvement of my colleagues from Ohio, Senator Voinovich and Senator DeWine, on the issue of Peace Corps volunteer safety and security. Both Senators have been diligently working on this issue, and I would note that Senator DeWine has introduced legislation to this end. I deeply appreciate the interest of my colleagues in the Peace Corps, and I do anticipate that Senator Voinovich will be able to be with us later this morning.

The committee will hear this morning from five outstanding witnesses. We will begin with the Peace Corps Director, Gaddi Vasquez. Director Vasquez brings a public service background to his position as Director, and his law enforcement experience informs his work on volunteer safety issues.

Director Vasquez will be followed by Jess Ford, Director of International Affairs and Trade at the General Accounting Office, who will provide us with an update of GAO's investigation of volunteer safety.

We will have three witnesses on our third panel.

First will be Kevin Quigley, President of the National Peace Corps Association and a former volunteer in Thailand in the 1970s. Mr. Quigley's organization represents some 30,000 returned Peace Corps volunteers.

Second we will hear from Cynthia Threlkeld, a Peace Corps country director serving in Guatemala, who can discuss the current state of volunteer safety and the role of the country director. Ms. Threlkeld, I might add, is a graduate of St. Thomas University in St. Paul, Minnesota and is a former director of the Minnesota International Center. We in Minnesota are very proud of Ms. Threlkeld and the thousands of other Peace Corps volunteers who have come out of our State.

Third we will hear from Gladys Maloy, a former Peace Corps volunteer who served just a few years ago in Romania. I am particularly glad to have Ms. Maloy here because she is an example of a volunteer who brought more years of experience to the field than the typical college graduate. Ms. Maloy is living proof of the benefits of diversifying the Peace Corps volunteer base to better reflect the face of America.

And now we will turn to Director Vasquez for his opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF GADDI VASQUEZ, DIRECTOR, PEACE CORPS,  
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Mr. VASQUEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I request that my full written statement be entered into the record.

Senator COLEMAN. Without objection.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I am pleased to appear before your committee today, and I appreciate the opportunity to present an overview of the current state of the Peace Corps and the many accomplishments that we as an agency have achieved since my arrival in February of 2002. Mr. Chairman, I also appreciate the ongoing support that you and this committee have shown for the Peace Corps.

While I understand the purpose of today's hearing is to discuss the safety and security framework that has been designed to protect Peace Corps volunteers, let me begin with some general comments about the Peace Corps and our goals.

More than 171,000 Americans have served as Peace Corps volunteers since 1961. These volunteers have helped dispel misconceptions about Americans, assisted in fostering positive relationships with host country nationals, promoted sustainable development, and returned back home with messages about life overseas, the people they have served, and the cultures they have experienced. The core values of the Peace Corps and the grassroots work that President John F. Kennedy envisioned when he established the Peace Corps remains relevant, vital, and strong.

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

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

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

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

Since taking office in February 2002, I have always been mindful of the new security environment that September 11th placed on overseas organizations like the Peace Corps.

Based on my personal experience as a former public safety official and aided by suggestions of others in the agency and recommendations from the GAO, the Peace Corps has taken the initiative to create and implement a number of safety enhancements. In 2002, I approved a reorganization that created a new Office of Safety and Security and increased by 80 the number of personnel dedicated to full-time safety and security, of which 95 percent of those 80 additional staff are deployed in the field.

The staff includes a new Associate Director of Safety and Security, a Chief Compliance Officer, a research psychologist, nine re-

gionally based safety and security officers, and 71 safety and security coordinators at each Peace Corps post.

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

The Peace Corps makes use of all available and appropriate technology to communicate with volunteers. As technology evolves, so does the volunteer use of technology. In some countries where cell phones are readily available, reliable, and widely used, almost all Peace Corps volunteers will have one. However, regardless of the availability of cell phones, the Peace Corps always has alternative methods of communication in place, and volunteers are required to provide at least three modes of communication on their locator forms.

The most effective tool for gauging success is to ask the volunteers. Every 2 years, the Peace Corps conducts a global survey to measure the level of volunteer satisfaction with programming, safety, medical, and other key indicators. In the most recent volunteer survey, which had a 68 percent response rate, 97 percent of the respondents replied that they felt very safe to adequately safe where they live; 99 percent of the respondents felt very safe to adequately safe where they work; 89 percent of the respondents overwhelmingly responded in the affirmative when asked if they would make the same decision to join the Peace Corps.

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

Last month the Peace Corps contracted with outside experts to perform an objective and independent analysis of the Peace Corps workforce, including the Office of Inspector General. At the conclusion of the consultant's review, I will make further decisions about any other appropriate exemptions for personnel related to safety and security.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, our agency has accomplished a great deal over the past 26 months in both safety and security and growth of our programs. I am grateful to you and members of the committee for your continued support of the Peace Corps mission. I believe that the Peace Corps is well positioned to safely achieve expansion without compromising the quality of the volunteer experience, and we can build upon the successes of the past 43 years.

Mr. Chairman, I am now prepared to answer any questions that you or members of the committee may have. I thank you for this opportunity.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Vasquez follows:]



## PREPARED STATEMENT OF GADDI H. VASQUEZ

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

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

While I understand the purpose of today's hearing is to discuss the safety and security framework that has been designed to protect Peace Corps Volunteers, let me begin with some general comments about the Peace Corps and our goals. In March, we celebrated the Peace Corps' 43rd anniversary. We have learned valuable lessons during the last four decades. More than 171,000 Americans have served as Peace Corps Volunteers. The Volunteers have helped dispel misconceptions about Americans, assisted in fostering positive relationships with host country nationals, promoted sustainable development, and returned back home with messages about life overseas, the people they have served, and the cultures they have experienced. The core values of the Peace Corps and the grassroots work that President John F. Kennedy envisioned when he signed the Executive Order establishing the Peace Corps on March 1, 1961, remain relevant, vital, and strong.

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

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

This past year has brought many accomplishments. It has been an exciting time at the agency as we continue to carry out President Bush's call to public service and his goal to increase the number of Peace Corps Volunteers serving in the field. Mr. Chairman, the Peace Corps is pleased to be on a pathway for growth. However, since the amounts provided in the appropriations process for the past two years have fallen significantly short of that needed to meet the goal of doubling the number of Volunteers, we are pursuing the strongest growth possible within the constraints of our resources. However, I am happy to report that in September 2003, the Peace Corps achieved a 28-year high with 7,533 Volunteers working in 71 countries in the areas of agriculture, business development, education, the environment, health and HIV/AIDS education and prevention, and youth development.

By knowing local cultures and communicating in local languages, the Peace Corps continues to be actively engaged in activities addressing HIV/AIDS, at the grassroots level, providing over two million service hours a year. Fighting the ravages of this disease is paramount to the survival of people across the globe, and important to this agency. All Volunteers who serve in our 26 African nations—regardless of their program sector—are trained to provide HIV/AIDS prevention and education. In fiscal year 2003, for example, we re-entered the countries of Botswana and Swaziland exclusively to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic. We are also collaborating with the Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator to continue our work in this arena and seeking to assist in meeting the President's challenge to provide treatment to 2 million HIV-infected people; prevent 7 million new infections; and, offer care to 10 million people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, including orphans and vulnerable children. The Peace Corps is projected to receive \$1.13 million from the Global HIV/AIDS Initiative for work in 6 of the 14 focus countries in the President's Emergency Plan. We continue to be involved in the efforts of the other nine focus countries, as well.

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

In May, I visited Azerbaijan—one of our newest country entries. Azerbaijan has a Muslim population of over 90 percent. It was truly heartwarming to see after four short months the rapport of the Volunteers among the elementary school children and the eagerness of these young students to learn English. The President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, also expressed his profound appreciation for the Peace Corps Volunteers and mentioned his desire to see Peace Corps programs in Azerbaijan expand in the future beyond English education.

#### *New Initiatives and Accomplishments*

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

In February of 2004, the Peace Corps and the American Association of Community Colleges unveiled a new, groundbreaking recruitment initiative that will increase awareness of opportunities for specially trained Americans to share their skills internationally. It will allow those with the experience and occupational and technical skills—such as licensed nurses and trained information technology experts—to respond to the critical needs of countries where Peace Corps Volunteers serve. The rollout was launched in four different regions of the United States—Washington D.C., Colorado, California, and Minnesota—and has been met with an overwhelming positive response. In fact, many community colleges nationwide are expanding their international programs and view Peace Corps service as an opportunity to enhance their graduates' professional careers.

On November 12, 2003, I signed an historic agreement that will lead to Peace Corps Volunteers serving in Mexico for the first time. This innovative partnership will allow Volunteers to join along side the National Council on Science and Technology (CONACYT) of Mexico and work in the areas of information technology, small business development, and science and technology. The Peace Corps country director has been selected and the first group of Volunteers will arrive in Mexico this fall.

#### *Travel to Peace Corps Countries*

Over the past year, I have also had the privilege to travel to 17 different Peace Corps countries from Central and South America, to Africa, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Pacific. During each visit, I met with Volunteers, host government officials, and representatives of our U.S. missions abroad. The support and enthusiasm I have received from each of these groups remains very high. In Fiji, for example, I was approached by a man in his mid-thirties, asking if I was the Peace Corps Director. The man stated that he had recognized me from the news the night before and was very excited that Peace Corps had returned to Fiji. He went on to explain that as a young boy he was taught by Peace Corps Volunteers and has never forgotten them. This type of story is repeated to me over and over throughout my travels. The Peace Corps continues to leave a lasting legacy across the globe, which I experience each time I travel abroad.

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

Just two weeks ago, I returned from Peru where President Toledo thanked the Peace Corps again for returning to his country. In expressing his deep appreciation for the Volunteers, President Toledo said, “I can’t be objective about the Peace Corps because the Peace Corps changed my life when I was just a young man.” President Toledo, a strong advocate of the Peace Corps, first encountered Volunteers as a youth. They lived with his family, taught him English and later helped him gain admission to a college in the United States. After being elected president in 2001, he invited the Peace Corps to return to Peru after a 27-year absence. A third group of 13 Volunteers was sworn-in at the Presidential Palace during my visit.

*Volunteer Safety and Security: Our Overarching Priority*

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

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

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

Based on my personal experience as a former public safety official, and aided by suggestions of others in the agency, the recommendations and findings from the General Accounting Office’s July 2002 report on Volunteer safety, and Volunteers in the field, the Peace Corps has taken the initiative to create and implement a number of safety enhancements. In 2002, I approved a reorganization that created a new Office of Safety and Security and increased by 80 people the number of full-time safety and security staff, 95 percent of whom are deployed overseas.

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

Other new initiatives in safety and security include:

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

The Peace Corps Safety and Security Officers (PCSSOs) play a vital new role in conducting country specific safety and security risk assessments. At the request of a Country Director, a PCSSO will enter the host country and consult with embassy personnel, local NGOs, government ministries, police officials, and Peace Corps staff to review the current safety and security environment and offer suggested enhancements when necessary. In Panama, for example, the Country Director was trying to ascertain if Volunteers could be placed in new sections of one of the poorest regions in the country. A review of this province was part of the PCSSO's overall safety and security assessment.

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

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

While the pre-service training contains many important technical components, language, cultural nuances, and safety and security training are key factors in preparing a Volunteer for integration into the host community and laying the groundwork for a safe and fulfilling Volunteer experience. High quality, practical cross-cultural training is also a cornerstone of Volunteer training. At the conclusion of pre-service training, "trainees" must pass a series of 10 core safety and security competencies before being sworn in as full-fledged Peace Corps Volunteers, which were recently revised this year. These core competencies require trainees to demonstrate an understanding of issues such as personal safety strategies, dealing with unwanted attention, identifying risk factors and strategies for avoiding risk, and the importance of incident reporting. They must also be able to communicate basic messages in the local language, exhibit an understanding of Peace Corps policies, as well as know their roles and responsibilities in the Emergency Action Plan.

Earlier this year, the Peace Corps formalized its worldwide guidance that recommends a minimum of two site visits during the first year (including one visit within the first three months) and one visit during the second year. In addition to these minimum guidelines, each post develops country-specific standards on the timing and frequency of site visits that reflects the location and placement of each Volunteer in-country. While the APCDs—who oversee individual Volunteer programming—may have the most regular contact, Volunteers may also be visited by Peace Corps Medical Officers, Safety and Security Coordinators, or the Country Director. Where applicable, Volunteer Leaders also make site visits, and act as mentors to integrate new Volunteers as they adapt to their sites. Aside from visiting Volunteers at their sites, in-country staff interact with Volunteers when they come to the Peace Corps Office to conduct business, gather for their in-service training programs or attend other events over the two-year period. Overall, the Peace Corps has guidance in place to promote frequent visits and contact with Volunteers, recognizing that each country must establish its own schedule, reflecting the geography and infrastructure of the country.

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

In the activation of an Emergency Action Plan, as well as in more isolated emergencies—such as notification of a serious illness of a family member at home—the Peace Corps needs to be able to reach Volunteers at their sites. The Peace Corps

makes use of all available and appropriate technology to communicate with Volunteers. As technology evolves, so does the Volunteers' use of technology. In some countries, where cell phones are readily available, reliable, and widely used, almost all Peace Corps Volunteers will have one. For example, almost 100 percent of the Volunteers in South Africa have cell phones. In others, where cell phone coverage is non-existent or sporadic at best, Volunteers make use of the best parts of the communications infrastructure of that country. For instance, in the South Pacific Islands, cell phone systems are not available. Instead, solar-powered land lines are available to be used by Volunteers with Iridium phones as back up with the Volunteer Leaders. Overall, posts use a combination of cell phones, land lines, solar-powered land lines, e-mail, beepers, radios, and message relay systems to reach Volunteers on a regular basis and in emergency situations. Regardless of the availability of cell phones, the Peace Corps always has alternative methods of communication in place and Volunteers are required to provide at least three modes of communication on their site locator forms. Furthermore, when Peace Corps Volunteers are placed in communities around the world, they have a circle of support around them that includes local host country nationals as well as Peace Corps staff. As would be the case here in the United States, if a person were in distress, friends, neighbors, colleagues, host country counterparts, and local police are available to assist with the situation and to send and receive emergency messages.

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

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

#### *Tracking Assaults for Prevention Purposes*

In 1990, the Peace Corps designed the Assault Notification and Surveillance System (ANSS) for internal tracking purposes. From this data, Peace Corps has enhanced policies, systems, and training to help prevent future Volunteer assaults. The Peace Corps had collected assault data before 1990 but not in a form that facilitated trend analysis.

The ANSS established specific definitions to allow for the systematic collection of data regarding the characteristics of an assault event. Definitions are critical to ensure consistency for trend analysis and prevention purposes so that the prevention strategies are appropriate to the types of incidents taking place. The Peace Corps uses safety statistics to increase the understanding of trends so that training and policies can be adjusted and safety enhanced. Improvements in safety reporting have allowed the Peace Corps to identify associated risk factors (time of day, location, alcohol use, means of transportation, etc.) and develop strategies to help Volunteers address them.

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

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

*Proposed Legislation*

I am aware of the legislation that has been introduced affecting the Peace Corps. One of the major strengths of the Peace Corps Act is that it is a broad authorization, which has over the years, given ample opportunity for the agency to maintain its independence and its effectiveness. Congress set forth broad objectives, and let the Executive Branch, in consultation with the host government or its peoples establish programs that meet the individual needs of each country. Few agencies have been so successfully and efficiently managed over such a long period. To maintain our effectiveness in an era of continued growth and opportunity requires that management has the flexibility to make decisions that best serve the agency and, most importantly, the Volunteers. The Administration does not believe that this legislation is in the best interest of this agency or will significantly improve Volunteer safety.

The Peace Corps currently has a positive and independent working relationship with the Office of Inspector General (IG), as a Designated Federal Entity under the Inspector General Act of 1978. The budget for the office has consistently increased over the last three years, with a current budget of \$2.55 million in fiscal year 2004 supporting 17 positions (the total budget for the agency is \$308 million). Given the size of our agency and funding level, we find this arrangement appropriate and in line with similar agencies of our size and stature. Other agencies where the Inspector General is appointed by the head of an agency include AMTRAK, the Federal Reserve, EEOC, and SEC. The President appoints Inspector Generals at large departments and agencies, such as DOD, Commerce Department, Department of Education, HHS, and HUD.

The most recent debate in Congress over IG status has revolved not around creating more Presidentially appointed IGs, but instead eliminating the IGs of smaller agencies and putting those agencies under the IGs of larger agencies. This bill would move in the opposite direction, when we believe the current relationship is appropriate and working effectively.

An additional consequence of the proposed legislation would be that the IG would make his or her own budget request directly to Congress. This could result in the IG competing with the Peace Corps' overall budget request. At present, a competitive process does not exist and, over the past three years, the Office of the IG has consistently received the funding increases requested by the IG.

Secondly, we find it unnecessary to permanently institute an Office of the Ombudsman. This new statutory requirement would be duplicative on many levels, diluting the authority already granted to the Office of the Inspector General and supplanting existing complaint/grievance process. Given the broad parameters that we understand the legislation would create for the Ombudsman, it could actually conflict with the Inspector General's existing jurisdictional authority and could artificially interrupt standard review procedures. In addition, the office could open the agency to a large universe of potential complainants and complaints, since the legislation not only allows current and former Volunteers access to the Ombudsman, but all current and former Peace Corps employees including personal services contractors. The agency has already taken steps to consider establishing an internal liaison to facilitate post-medical services issues on behalf of returning Volunteers—an item I will address further at the close of my remarks. Again, while the idea of an Ombudsman may have merit, we do not see the creation of a separate office of the proposed scope and magnitude as an effective use of agency funds, in part because it is duplicative of current grievance procedures.

*Impact of the 5-year rule*

As you may know, the Peace Corps is a unique federal agency in that most employees are limited to serving the agency for five years, though we are permitted to extend the service of a limited number of employees past the five-year mark. This creates a dynamic, energetic atmosphere in which Peace Corps staff works hard to have a positive impact on the agency during their five-year tenure. Recently, Congress gave the Peace Corps authority to exempt certain positions associated with safety and security from the five-year rule. Since this is a departure from our historical employment laws and regulation, I carefully reviewed the positions and formally designated our first group of 23 exempt positions on October 29, 2003. Nineteen of these positions are in our newly re-organized Office of Safety and Security, which is the Peace Corps office primarily responsible for Volunteer safety and security. One Safety and Security Desk Officer position in each of the regional directorates has been designated, and the position of Director of Quality Improvement in the Office of Medical Services has also been exempted. We believe that these 23 positions are the most clear-cut and readily justifiable applications of the new authority, as they most directly and obviously impact Volunteer safety. Additionally, the 71 safety

and security coordinator positions at post are not subject to the five-year rule limitation.

While these were the most obvious designations, I directed the hiring of an independent expert to review Peace Corps operations and make recommendations on what additional, second-tier safety-related positions should be exempted from the five-year rule. Just last month, the Peace Corps contracted with outside experts to perform an objective and independent analysis of the Peace Corps workforce, including the Office of the Inspector General. At the conclusion of the consultants' review, I will make decisions about any other appropriate exemptions for personnel related to safety and security. Because of these on-going activities to implement the five-year rule exemption appropriately, we also do not see the necessity of further legislation in this regard. The first 23 positions, which directly impact Volunteer safety and security, are now exempt and we expect to exempt a number of second-tier positions as we proceed through this process.

#### *Volunteer Care*

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

Thus, we constantly work to provide support to our Volunteers and continually seek ways to improve. During a Peace Corps Volunteer's service in the field, the Office of Special Services plays an essential role in our Volunteer support system. For instance, the Office of Special Services coordinates the after-hours duty system, which provides 24 hours a day, seven days a week coverage for all Volunteers and their families. Parents may call this office, at any time, if they need to advise their Volunteer of a critical illness or death of a family member. The Office of Special Services immediately informs the Country Director so that the information is passed on to the Volunteer as soon as possible, and arrangements can be made for special emergency leave if appropriate. The Office of Special Services also serves as a key link with families in the intense time of a country evacuation or the tragic event of the death of a Volunteer. This office is also a key resource for staff and volunteers in assisting with mental health and behavioral issues. In all of these situations, the trained professionals who work in the Office of Special Services strive to provide top-quality care, timely information, and supportive service to Peace Corps Volunteers and their families. Here is just a sample of one family's experience. "When Peace Corps called us about Beth's accident in Zambia and her life-flight to Pretoria, my husband, Gerry, immediately flew to South Africa to be with our daughter . . . Through this terrible time, I was in close telephone contact with a Peace Corps counselor in Washington, D.C. When Gerry arrived, he was met and supported throughout by a Peace Corps medical officer . . . the Peace Corps was our advocate in every way possible. They treated us as though we were part of their own family."

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

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

Peace Corps staff has been vigilant in trying to ensure that claims on behalf of returned Peace Corps Volunteers are processed by the Department of Labor in a timely manner. We are proud to report that the backlog that previously existed has now been eliminated and that the Peace Corps recently received recognition by the Department of Labor as the agency with the quickest filing results. Progress in this area rewards former Volunteers that have already served their country and enhance the attractiveness of the Peace Corps Volunteer program to future Volunteers. As we strive to provide our Volunteers with the best service possible, we always welcome new ideas.

Additionally, when a Volunteer completes his or her service, the Volunteer has the opportunity to purchase private health insurance through CorpsCare (a program similar to the COBRA health insurance plan). Peace Corps pays the first premium covering the first 31 days and then the individual can continue to purchase the policy for up to 18 months. The policy is designed to cover any medical issues not related to a Volunteer's service, including full coverage for pre-existing conditions without a waiting period. After identifying a gap in which many Volunteers who purchased CorpsCare were experiencing a lag time as they awaited a decision on their FECA claim, Peace Corps renegotiated the CorpsCare contract to provide former Volunteers with greater continuity of coverage. The new CorpsCare contract went into effect on March 1, 2004, and we are especially pleased with this new arrangement, which should be a great improvement in providing care for returned Peace Corps Volunteers.

As we seek to further Peace Corps' three goals, the Volunteer is always the central focus. We are continually striving to improve the agency and ensure that our Peace Corps Volunteers have meaningful, productive, and life-changing experiences as they serve throughout the world. More than 171,000 Americans have served in the Peace Corps, and we look forward to providing excellent care to the people of the United States who may serve, are serving, or have returned from service. The Peace Corps will not rest on our achievements and accomplishments. We will build on the successes and learn from events as they occur. Not long ago, I read a message from the parent of a volunteer who was grateful for the quality of care that was rendered by Peace Corps staff overseas and here in the United States. The parent wrote, "As a United States citizen, I am very proud of the Peace Corps; it is a superb organization worthy of every citizen's support."

#### *Conclusion*

The safety of the Volunteer is the number one priority of the Peace Corps, and remains the primary focus of many of the research, planning, training, and compliance components of the agency. As noted above, our agency has accomplished a great deal over the past 26 months—in both safety and security and the growth of our program. Our FY 2005 budget request of \$401 million will support this continued growth and maintain the infrastructure we presently have in place.

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

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you, Director Vasquez.

Before we begin the questioning, I would like to turn to my colleague, Senator Dodd, for any opening statement he might have.

#### **STATEMENT OF HON. CHRISTOPHER J. DODD, U.S. SENATOR FROM CONNECTICUT**

Senator DODD. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

How are you, Mr. Vasquez? Nice to see you. I apologize for arriving a couple minutes late, but I would like to make an opening comment, if I could.

First of all, let me commend you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. It is very worthwhile and I am grateful to you for doing so. I think it an important issue of safety and security of volunteers, and it gives us an opportunity to evaluate one of the most important aspects of this very, very important program.



I am hopeful that witnesses testifying before the committee this morning, who represent voices from inside and outside of the agency, will provide us with some very helpful insights as we consider the legislation that Senators DeWine and Durbin have introduced.

As a returned Peace Corps volunteer, I am very proud to have been a part of that agency, the 170,000 of us as former volunteers. There are now several of us. In fact, Chris Shays whose wife Betsy actually worked for the Peace Corps—I think we are the only State to have a House member and a Senate member who are former Peace Corps volunteers. Paul Tsongas and I were the first two former volunteers to be elected to the Congress. Thomas Jefferson was President I think when I was elected here.

[Laughter.]

Senator DODD. It seems that long ago.

Obviously, to have been a part of this remarkable agency that was a part of President John Kennedy's visionary program—actually I always say as well—and one of the ideas of Hubert Humphrey—he does not get enough credit in my view, but actually Hubert Humphrey came up with a concept, an idea that has been around for some time in other nations around the globe. But obviously John Kennedy rightfully deserves a lot of credit because he made the program come alive, obviously, under his administration.

I recall with great fondness, as I have said on numerous occasions over the years, serving with the Peace Corps in the Dominican Republic and the lessons I learned there, and the experiences I gained from those years have benefited me tremendously and had an awful lot to do with my decision to enter public life.

It is my hope that more young Americans would have the opportunity to join the Peace Corps, and I am pleased to hear about the numbers that you, Gaddi, have just mentioned in terms of the high watermark of people volunteering or seeking to volunteer.

At the same time, there has never been a moment in our history where the Peace Corps' objectives are more urgent than now, and we all know this almost on a daily basis. Indeed, our woeful lack of understanding about the cultures and languages, the misperceptions that others hold about our country have contributed to some of the highest rates ever of anti-American sentiment around the globe. That is why now, more than ever, we must remember why the Peace Corps is so important because the Peace Corps and its volunteers not only help those in need, but they also help build bridges of mutual understanding and good trust. I have often said the presumptuous idea of sending predominantly very young Americans over to eradicate ignorance, poverty, and disease was outweighed by the tremendous benefit that comes back to our country of having literally hundreds and thousands of people who have had an experience in a different environment, a greater appreciation of our own country, and a better understanding of the world in which we live.

It is the broad context that the next question of safety for Americans serving overseas takes on a new degree of urgency. I would say to you, Mr. Chairman, that the seven-part series of Peace Corps security issues which appeared in the Dayton Daily News—and our colleague, George Voinovich, is here from that State. I know he knows a lot about this, having followed those stories in

the Dayton papers—raised some very serious questions about safety and security of volunteers serving abroad and about the agency's response to those problems. It is my hope that our witnesses this morning will shed some additional light on those allegations, as well as the steps that the Peace Corps can take—and they have mentioned some of those already—to address these issues.

Clearly, we all expect, to the maximum extent possible, that Peace Corps management has as one of its highest priorities, if not its highest priority, working to ensure that volunteers have quality experiences in safe and secure environments. Based upon recent GAO findings and the Peace Corps' own statements, it would appear that steps are being taken to enhance security and better prepare volunteers for their service.

I certainly look forward, Mr. Chairman, to a detailed description by the Director of the Peace Corps about what has already been done and what the agency intends to do in the future to address legitimate concerns, particularly at the same time that the agency is under pressure to vastly expand the numbers of volunteers in the field. Those can be tremendously contradictory goals we are trying to achieve. As mostly young American men and women venture out to the least developed corners of the world to become our grassroots ambassadors, if you will, it is our responsibility as the oversight committee to ensure that the agency is afforded every necessary resource to ensure our volunteers' safety.

I will be asking some questions, Mr. Chairman, a little later in the process here, which I am sure you and the Director would anticipate; you have already with some of your comments. But I want to stress the importance of three points, if I can, in conclusion.

First, an evaluation of the safety and security of Peace Corps volunteers is timely and appropriate, and I welcome it. But I would hope that our witnesses would not interpret our questions as an attack on the viability of the program as a whole. The Peace Corps enjoys broad bipartisan support precisely because it is such a successful element of our foreign policy.

Second, we must always situate our discussion within the realm of the possible. It might not be realistic to assume that we can prevent any and every incident of violence against Peace Corps volunteers, but that should be our goal certainly. That is why we need to use every resource at our disposal to prevent such acts from occurring, and we must be open about the threats that exist and learn from our mistakes so that we do not repeat them.

Third, and finally, if we create new responsibilities for the Peace Corps administration, then we have also got to ensure that we provide adequate funding for them to meet those requirements so that existing programs and goals do not suffer as a result.

Again, I want to thank our witnesses for being here today, for their time, and for their willingness to speak frankly about the challenges of providing safety and security for thousands of Americans serving around the globe in some of the most difficult spots. They do a tremendous job, and while certainly security is a tremendous issue and one that we have got to put at the top of our list of priorities, I do not want to see us sacrifice the goal. If we end up not sending people into areas that are difficult, then the very purpose of the Peace Corps and the values we have associated with

it will be lost. These are the times when, clearly, there are those around the globe who do not like the Peace Corps, who would prefer that this program did not exist. It is a great challenge to those who want to undermine American values. So I would hope we keep it in balance here as we move forward.

But again, Mr. Chairman, I thank you for holding the hearing.

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you, Senator Dodd. I must say that on issue after issue, you bring an experienced perspective to what we discuss. Here you also bring a deeply personal commitment to the success of this program, and I do appreciate that. Thank you very much.

Senator Voinovich.

**STATEMENT OF HON. GEORGE V. VOINOVICH,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM OHIO**

Senator VOINOVICH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank Senator Lugar and Senator Biden for agreeing to convene this hearing to examine the safety and security of our Peace Corps. I would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and underscore the fact that you are the chairman of the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Peace Corps, and Narcotics Affairs. You have got a big plate in terms of your chairmanship.

Senator COLEMAN. I am trying to figure out who put all those together and into one committee. I am going to find that person.

[Laughter.]

Senator VOINOVICH. As my colleagues are aware, last October Senator Mike DeWine and I asked this committee to convene a hearing to assess the safety and security of our Peace Corps volunteers after the *Dayton Daily News* published an eye-opening series of articles which highlighted violent assault, robbery, rapes, and murders perpetrated against Peace Corps volunteers serving around the world.

To prepare this in-depth report, the *Dayton Daily News* reporters spent more than 2 years interviewing more than 500 people. I think that in itself is a great contribution to this committee, Mr. Chairman. They traveled to 11 countries and filed dozens of Freedom of Information Act requests. Their findings raised serious questions regarding areas in which Peace Corps volunteers are vulnerable, and they have compelled us to look closely at measures in place to ensure the security of our volunteers. They have also led us to discuss ways that we might enhance these measures. I am sure, Mr. Vasquez, that you have read those articles. It was interesting, from hearing part of your testimony, that you are acting to try and deal with some of them.

While the majority of Peace Corps volunteers serve without incident, we cannot and should not ignore the reality that dangers exist for our volunteers, which have led to deadly consequences. Though there is an amount of risk inherent in the decision to serve abroad, there are areas in which the Peace Corps can take action to enhance the safety and security of its volunteers, the majority of whom are young women and men just out of college with little life experience or training in the jobs that they are asked to perform. You mentioned again that more training is so very, very important today.

In today's world, as the United States continues efforts to fight terrorism and address growing anti-Americanism, we should be proactive, not reactive, in our efforts to ensure that our volunteers serving overseas are as safe as possible. Peace Corps volunteers often serve in remote, undeveloped parts of the world. That has been the case; it is not likely to change. That being said, we must be certain that Peace Corps volunteers living and working in remote areas have the ability to immediately communicate with Peace Corps staff in times of emergency.

In many cases, volunteers in remote areas do not have access to a telephone, nor do they have access to the internet or to a radio. This was true with Peace Corps volunteer Lupine Skelly of Colville, Washington, who was assigned to a site 13 hours from Bolivia's capital city of La Paz, with an hour walk to the nearest bus stop and without access to a phone or to a radio.

This was also true for Peace Corps volunteer Walter Poirier, a 22-year-old graduate of Notre Dame, originally from Lowell, Massachusetts. Walter also went to Bolivia where he was assigned to promote tourism in the Zongo Valley, a task for which he had no training. Though he also worked in the capital city of La Paz, Walter lived in a remote area in the Zongo Valley. His site could be reached only by foot for the last quarter mile. Buses to La Paz took hours and they were infrequent.

As the *Dayton Daily News* reported, Walter Poirier was last seen in La Paz on January 31, 2001, at which time he e-mailed friends and family from his Yahoo e-mail account. He returned to his room in the Zongo Valley but has not been seen since that time. No one knew that Walter was missing until his mother, who had attempted to reach her son to no avail, called a Peace Corps hotline in Bolivia on March 4, 2001. Two days later, and more than one month after he was last seen on March 6th, Walter Poirier was officially declared missing.

In my view, volunteers living and working under such conditions must be able to quickly and effectively communicate with superiors in country in the event of an emergency. We should also look at the possibility of providing these volunteers with radios for use when they most need them. I understand that there are some areas where cell phones do not work, but communication today is one of the most important things we can make available to these young people. Relying on host communities which might not in every instance be supportive is simply not enough. This is particularly true in the event that a woman or a man is sexually assaulted.

Steps must also be taken to establish regular, frequent contact with Peace Corps volunteers. Limitations on the ability of country directors or associate directors to visit every volunteer site on a frequent basis can be understood. However, there must be checks in place to ensure that the whereabouts of all volunteers are known. It is inexcusable that a volunteer, such as Walter Poirier, would be missing for more than a month—more than a month—before his absence was noticed.

In an effort to promote safety and deter crime, it is also crucial that housing provided to Peace Corps volunteers be reviewed prior to sending a volunteer to a site. The *Dayton Daily News* report cites many instances of robbery and situations in which Peace

Corps volunteers called on their superiors to take action because they did not feel safe in their living arrangements. Peace Corps volunteer Pam Parsa, a graduate of Oberlin College in my State of Ohio, felt unsafe in her house in Gabon in 1998. She reported that her house had flimsy windows, and her doors were difficult to lock. She received new locks paid for by the Peace Corps, but still requested a change of housing, a request the Peace Corps did not respond to for more than 1 year.

The cases of Walter Poirier and others outlined in the *Dayton Daily News* are not representative of the experiences had by most of our volunteers. Thank God. They do, however, raise critical questions that must be addressed, and that is why we are here today for this hearing.

I appreciate the action taken by you, Mr. Vasquez, but I think that we need to understand that we need to stay on top of this. I have another committee that I am involved with. That is the Oversight of Government Management and the Federal Workforce in Governmental Affairs, and the real question I keep asking is, do you have the people to get the job done? What is your budget? The President has asked for twice the number of Peace Corps volunteers. That is easier said than done, and if it does occur, it means that the infrastructure of your agency, in terms of personnel and other things, has got to be expanded to respond to that. You cannot do it with the budget that you have currently.

I agree with Senator Dodd that the Peace Corps is very important. I think about our national security. I think intelligence is an area where we really need to do a much better job. However, we are not doing enough with diplomacy, and we are paying the price for that today. In terms of putting a new face on America, the Peace Corps has been probably the best face that we have ever put on in terms of this country. It is very, very important.

But if we expect people to stay in the Peace Corps, if we expect to be able to attract people into the Peace Corps, we have got to assure these young men and women that they are going to have the necessary communications capability, that they are going to have the security, and that they are going to have the housing so that they are willing to serve.

So I appreciate your leadership and look forward to asking you some questions.

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you, Senator Voinovich.

Director Vasquez, both my colleagues have raised the *Dayton Daily News* series, which reports a number of attackers who were never prosecuted, a 1997 case that was not even reported to the U.S. embassy. There was a clear implication in that series that the Peace Corps was more interested in preserving its own image than in dealing transparently with these incidents.

I would note, however, that, for instance, the Walter Poirier incident, was in 2001. I have received a lot of information from former volunteers who were incensed by these charges. One group of former volunteers in El Salvador called the articles exaggerated, sensational, and riddled with falsehoods. So there are some very different perspectives.

Can you first generally respond to the article, and then specifically, if you can talk about steps to improve follow-up after a crime

is committed, talk about where we are today. But if you could respond, I think it would be helpful.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, in general terms I have read the articles, and I will say that, first and foremost, I do not think the Peace Corps should ever stop or deviate from learning from the experiences and episodes that have occurred over the years. The majority of those that were described in the articles preceded my time, including Mr. Poirier, but I have examined some of those to try to learn from them to see what we can do differently.

But I will tell you that in my view there were some distortions. As an example, it was cited that a volunteer dies in service once every 2 months. The fact of the matter is I have been Director of the Peace Corps for over 2 years, and every loss of life is tragic and sad, but to represent that a volunteer dies every 2 months when, during my time, 3 volunteers have died in service is a bit of a distortion and a bit of a misrepresentation. If I were a reader and saw that account, it would cause me some concern.

But the fact of the matter is that we have taken very significant steps and implemented a number of new processes and procedures both in the field and here in Washington to enhance the locations, the sites where volunteers work, the reporting processes, the guidance that is provided to countries on where volunteers should be located, establishing new positions in each country. As an example, the new safety and security coordinators, which did not exist just a short couple of years ago, who are now in place who are responsible in country for the locator forms, to ensure that there is compliance with the standards and the guidance that the Peace Corps has put in place. So there have been very significant changes that have now been implemented throughout Peace Corps in response to a world that is changing, a world that is evolving.

If I may comment specifically to one particular point. I am committed to expanding and growing the Peace Corps, but only when it is appropriate and in a strategic manner. Part of that strategy is ensuring that we have, as Senator Voinovich has referred to, the infrastructure to be able to sustain the growth of the Peace Corps without compromising safety and security. As a former public safety official, I can tell you that part of risk management is constant risk assessment, and we are constantly reassessing our procedures and our policies, with the cooperation and support of our field staff to give us guidance, to give us input and feedback on what is going right, what is going wrong, and what we can do better.

Senator COLEMAN. One area the GAO raised had to do with volunteer assignments and whether they are defined properly, that if they are poorly defined, what it creates is idle time and limited contacts with counterparts. And you have, as a result of that, folks more apt to run into security problems. The GAO has written that "at posts we visited, we found instances of volunteers whose counterparts had no plans for their volunteers when they arrived at their sites. Only after several months and much frustration did the volunteers find productive activities."

Can you just discuss efforts to improve definition of volunteer assignments?

Mr. VASQUEZ. Well, first of all, an acknowledgement that I make right up front is that there are areas where we have sought to improve and enhance the relationship between host organizations, partner organizations, communities in the Peace Corps to be more definitive about those jobs. In fact, in the global survey that was done, the percentage of volunteers who described the match between their skills and the job they were doing was very, very high. I think it was in the 80th percentile who responded saying that their skills matched the job that they were doing.

I think it is a result of providing more specific guidance to our staffs in country to ensure that when volunteers are placed, they are placed in locations where they can make a meaningful contribution to the community in which they serve, but that volunteers can also take something from the experience of having served. So we have been more precise in the guidance. We have set standards for ensuring that volunteers are evaluated, and where a volunteer feels that he or she is not a good match, they are encouraged to communicate with country staff to indicate the kind of disconnect that may occur from time to time to hopefully reestablish them in a place or to take corrective action so that there is a better and clearer understanding.

Mr. Chairman, I agree with you. Idle time with volunteers is our worst enemy. Consequently, it is in our best interest—and I think we have done a fairly good job of making sure that guidance is available to country staff so that we minimize those instances where volunteers may feel a bit out of place and not connected with the job and the site they have been assigned to.

Senator COLEMAN. You mentioned in your testimony the areas where cell phone service is available and then you talked about three modes of communication. On the cell phone issue, do folks pay for that themselves? Is it part of the equipment that they are given? And could you be more specific, in those areas where there is not adequate cell phone coverage, what kind of modes of communication do volunteers have with country directors and others?

Mr. VASQUEZ. First of all, the cell phone issue is one that has been evolving. As you know, cellular technology is evolving very, very quickly in some of these countries. So when volunteers are able to acquire cell phones, we provide in our communications allocation that is made to volunteers the opportunity to acquire and to maintain a cell phone.

However, I must emphasize that part of our strategy is to ensure that we have backup positions so that we are not fully reliant on cellular technology. To do so I think would be compromising the safety and security of volunteers. It is just one avenue.

The other avenues that we use are land-line communications, local law enforcement that we have communications with, and also the host family or the host organization where volunteers may be working have different modes of communication that we are able to use and have on a number of occasions.

We test our processes. I might add at this time that we require that our posts engage in an assessment and an evaluation of how our communication systems work so that we check the layers of communication that exist in country to ensure that they are viable

and that they work and that they are in place and that they are effective, and where they are not, they are corrected.

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you, Director Vasquez.

Senator Dodd.

Senator DODD. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Again, thank you, Director Vasquez, for your testimony here this morning.

Let me, first of all, if I can, ask a general question. To what do you attribute this increase in the acts of violence? And then related, where are they coming from? Is it mostly urban areas? Are there specific regions within the Peace Corps that seem to have higher incidences of assaults than others? Give us some picture, if you can, globally of, one, why this seems to be occurring in your own mind or based on assessments that have been done. If there are any areas that have a higher rate than others, I would be curious to know about that.

Mr. VASQUEZ. First of all, Senator, the fact is that in a number of categories, the crime against volunteers over the last 2 or 3 years has been decreasing. It has not been increasing. So we have seen a downturn. We have provided reports that outline the specifics that indicate things like major sexual assaults, which have shown a decrease in the number of crimes being perpetrated against volunteers.

Senator DODD. So the number, 1991 to 2002, 125 percent increase, that number is actually down, 2003–2004, up to now?

Mr. VASQUEZ. That is correct, yes. So we have seen a decrease in the amount of crimes being perpetrated against volunteers. What we do find is that most volunteers, as I stated in my testimony, feel safe where they live, where they work. I think based on the information that I have reviewed in the last several months, the exposure, the vulnerability to crime increases in many instances—and you having been a volunteer, I think you can certainly appreciate what I am going to say about places like the Dominican Republic where you served, that once you get into capital cities, into highly urbanized areas, the problems of theft, the problems of pickpocketing, and other things that occur, occur sometimes on transportation systems, on buses, and other modes of transportation. Our indicators suggest that that is when volunteers feel most vulnerable.

When we become aware of situations and conditions where we see an increase in crimes that are affecting volunteers, be it public transportation or otherwise, country staffs conduct an evaluation with the safety and security coordinators. It may include the regional security officer at the embassy. It may include other safety and security personnel, local law enforcement to offer new guidelines, offer modification, offer alternative modes of transportation.

For example, if in an urban area we find that volunteers are being victimized on buses as a mode of transportation, the country director may authorize the use of private taxis for volunteers to be brought in from the fringes of a city to the country office. So we take corrective action as we conduct our risk assessments and detect that there are issues and problems that may be surfacing, depending on the location, depending on the country.



As to the areas where we have seen increases, we have probably seen a slight increase in crimes against volunteers occurring principally in Central America, some in South America, and in the Caribbean, which we call the Inter-America/Pacific Region in the Peace Corps. So those are the areas where we have seen a slight increase, but that is essentially where we've seen an increase in the number of crimes, but it has not been dramatically significant.

Senator DODD. Compare these numbers. I apologize for not knowing them myself, but the rates of attrition. The rate of attrition is around 30 percent, as I am told. Correct me if I am wrong about that. That attrition rate, I presume, you have got a relatively high rate of attrition I think initially. At least it seemed to me years ago. I do not know if it is still true, that you get high attrition rates early on in a program. Tell me how this is affecting the violence issues, the assault issues. Is that affecting attrition?

Mr. VASQUEZ. It is not. I have looked at some numbers just in the last week, and the reasons that volunteers cite for early termination, many of them are personal in nature, medical issues that emerge at home, professional opportunities that develop. A volunteer decides that he or she wants to go to grad school. They secure a job that they did not expect. So there are a number of reasons. The 30 percent that you cite in the termination rate is one that is based on that 27-month period. On an annual basis at Peace Corps globally it is about 10 percent of the volunteers who early terminate. Again, the list of reasons that volunteers terminate is very, very long, but most of them are personal in nature, family-related issues. Illness may be a factor for some. And as the Peace Corps diversifies, that is, older volunteers, married couples, start coming into the Peace Corps in greater numbers, we begin to see, of course, the corresponding impact of reasons and causes for people to early terminate.

Senator DODD. Some time ago, the Peace Corps counted an assault as a single incident, even when there might be more than one volunteer involved, rather than identifying, for instance, where there were three volunteers who were assaulted as three events, as one event. Are you still doing that?

Mr. VASQUEZ. Yes, Senator, we are doing it. We are using the system that we have discussed and had evaluated by the Department of Justice, Bureau of Crime Statistics, which uses an incident-based reporting system. It is a system the Peace Corps has used now for I think about 10 years, and it is a system that is established to evaluate incidents because we use them to train, to change policies, to change practices, to change procedures. I was in law enforcement. We used incident-based reporting to establish incidences and crime trends so that then we could take corrective action. Peace Corps uses the same approach which is to evaluate incidents as they occur. Even though there may be multiple victims, we certainly provide assistance, support, remedy, and recourse, legal and otherwise, for all of the victims. That is not diminished. We use it on an incident-based platform or methodology because we look at the incidents so that we can learn from them; we can train accordingly, and we can reform our practices where we see a pattern developing of incidents of crimes against volunteers.

Senator DODD. Let me ask you the obvious question here. You told me at the outset of my questioning that the actual numbers are down in 2003 and 2004 from the 125 percent that the Dayton papers identified.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Yes.

Senator DODD. To what extent would you alter your answer to my question if you counted the number of volunteers that were actually assaulted as opposed to the incidents?

Mr. VASQUEZ. I could provide specific numbers, if you would allow me, as a follow-up. There is a very slight difference or moderation based on the numbers that I have been shown. We keep those statistics. We have those statistics available.

I might also add that under our new process one of the new offices that we have created at Peace Corps is an office that is dedicated solely to evaluating crime statistics and data relative to incidents and number of volunteers who were victimized to look at the occurrences, to look at the incidents, and to make recommendations on practices and procedures that we might change our in training components. What we are basically doing is looking beneath the numbers to see what kind of causes, what kind of practices, may be contributing to an escalation.

Senator DODD. But you understand my question.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Yes, sir.

Senator DODD. So your numbers do not change then. There still is a decline. We are not looking at necessarily more volunteers who might have been assaulted in a single incident, my point being is you count incidents. You do not count volunteers.

Mr. VASQUEZ. That is correct.

Senator DODD. So the numbers do not change. Still the numbers are going down of the numbers of volunteers who have been assaulted.

Mr. VASQUEZ. I would not be able to respond to you directly but can provide supplemental information on the specific number, whether there would be a significant impact. I have seen a snapshot of the last 5 years or so, and if you look at the number of incidents, the number of volunteers impacted in those incidents and compare them year to year, the difference in the number of victims per year is very, very slight.

Senator DODD. Good. Mr. Chairman, it might be worthwhile to get that.

Senator COLEMAN. Please provide that, Director Vasquez. Thank you.

[The information referred to above follows:]

### Overview of Major Sexual and Physical Assaults by Number of PCVs Involved, 2000–2004

2000

Type of incident	Total Number of Events	Number of Events w/more than one PCV	Total Number of PCVs	V/T Years
Major Sexual Assault .....	11	3	16	4170
Major Physical Assault .....	26	6	37	6831

Source: Assault Notification and Surveillance System (ANSS). Data is accurate as of 6/30/04.

In 2000, the breakdowns of assaults are as follows:

- Major Sexual Assaults
  - 8 events involved 1 PCV
  - 2 event involved 2 PCVs
  - 1 event involved 4 PCVs
- Major Physical Assaults
  - 20 events involved 1 PCV
  - 3 events involved 2 PCVs
  - 2 events involved 3 PCVs
  - 1 event involved 5 PCVs

2001

Type of incident	Total Number of Events	Number of Events w/more than one PCV	Total Number of PCVs	V/T Years
Major Sexual Assault .....	23	0	23	4089
Major Physical Assault .....	21	8	36	6729

Source: Assault Notification and Surveillance System (ANSS). Data is accurate as of 6/30/04.

In 2001, the breakdowns of assaults are as follows:

- Major Sexual Assaults
  - 23 events involved 1 PCV
- Minor Physical Assaults
  - 13 events involved 1 PCV
  - 5 events involved 2 PCVs
  - 2 events involved 3 PCVs
  - 1 event involved 7 PCVs

2002

Type of incident	Total Number of Events	Number of Events w/more than one PCV	Total Number of PCVs	V/T Years
Major Sexual Assault .....	17	0	17	3808
Major Physical Assault .....	20	5	29	6277

Source: Assault Notification and Surveillance System (ANSS). Data is accurate as of 6/30/04.

In 2002, the breakdowns of assaults are as follows:

- Major Sexual Assaults
  - 17 events involved 1 PCV
- Major Physical Assaults
  - 15 events involved 1 PCV
  - 2 events involved 2 PCVs
  - 2 events involved 3 PCVs
  - 1 event involved 4 PCVs

2003

Type of incident	Total Number of Events	Number of Events w/more than one PCV	Total Number of PCVs	V/T Years
Major Sexual Assault .....	11	2	13	3931
Major Physical Assault .....	20	6	35	6656

Source: Assault Notification and Surveillance System (ANSS). Data is accurate as of 6/30/04.

In 2003, the breakdowns of assaults are as follows:

- Major Sexual Assaults
  - 9 events involved 1 PCV
  - 2 events involved 2 PCVs
- Major Physical Assaults
  - 14 events involved 1 PCV
  - 2 events involved 2 PCVs
  - 2 events involved 3 PCVs
  - 1 event involved 4 PCVs
  - 1 event involved 7 PCVs

Senator DODD. I see the time is up. I will come back. We are going to have another round, I suppose, of questions too.

There is a piece that I have been asked by Senator Sarbanes to include in the record, some comments by Hugh Pickens, who is the publisher of the Peace Corps Online, regarding the 5-year rule. And I would like to ask unanimous consent to include that.

Senator COLEMAN. Without objection.

[The letter referred to by Senator Dodd follows:]

#### A CRITICAL FLAW IN THE PROPOSED PEACE CORPS SAFETY AND SECURITY BILL

Mr. Chairman:

My name is Hugh Pickens, I served in the Peace Corps in Peru from 1970 to 1973, I publish a Web Site and News Forum that is read by 100,000 Returned Peace Corps Volunteers and Friends of the Peace Corps every month, and I am here to point out a critical fault in the proposed "Peace Corps Safety and Security Bill of 2003" that needs to be corrected before this bill passes the Senate.

#### THE FIVE-YEAR RULE

The Peace Corps is unique among federal agencies because employees receive time-limited appointments and most employees are limited to a maximum of five

years of employment with the agency. The five-year rule has been a cornerstone of Peace Corps' organizational structure and has kept the Peace Corps institutionally young and innovative over the past 40 years. Its purpose is to ensure that the agency does not fall into the trap of entrenched government bureaucracies where it is impossible to fire a civil servant no matter how incompetent he or she may be. As a volunteer organization, the principle has been that neither Peace Corps volunteers nor Peace Corps employees have lifetime employment at the agency.

The five-year rule was instituted by Sargent Shriver and was codified into law as an amendment to the Peace Corps Act in 1965. Over the years there have been numerous critiques of the five-year rule: that it interferes with the Peace Corps' institutional memory, that the agency continually has to break in new people, and that the Peace Corps has to let people go just when they are getting good at their jobs.

At the same time the rule has been modified so that a certain percentage of Peace Corps employees are eligible to have their employment extended for up to 8½ years (three 2½ year terms plus a one year extension). Still the principle of "In, Up, and Out" has remained the same over the past 40 years—to keep the Peace Corps institutionally young by continuously bringing in new blood.

#### *An Exemption to the Five-Year Rule*

One year ago a clause was put into the "Consolidated Appropriations Bill of 2003" that exempted employees working in Safety and Security from the five-year rule:

Quote:

*Provided further*, That the Director of the Peace Corps may make appointments or assignments, or extend current appointments or assignments, to permit United States citizens to serve for periods in excess of 5 years in the case of individuals whose appointment or assignment, such as regional safety security officers and employees within the Office of the Inspector General, involves the safety of Peace Corps volunteers:

*Provided further*, That the Director of the Peace Corps may make such appointments or assignments notwithstanding the provisions of section 7 of the Peace Corps Act limiting the length of an appointment or assignment, the circumstances under which such an appointment or assignment may exceed 5 years, and the percentage of appointments or assignments that can be made in excess of 5 years.

Director Vasquez supported this change to the five-year rule and wrote letters to over fifty members of Congress on the Conference Committee for the Appropriations bill urging them to support this change to the five-year rule.

#### *This Bill Expands the Exemption*

The "Safety and Security Bill" that is now under consideration takes the exemption one step further and provides an exemption to the five year rule to employees who work in safety and security, members of the Inspector General's office and personnel involved in medical services.

This Bill also contains a clause for the Comptroller General to study the five year rule and report back in one year with recommendations, if any, for legislation to amend provisions of the Peace Corps Act relating to the five year rule.

These exemptions will create a two-tiered employment structure at the Peace Corps which will damage morale at the agency. More importantly, these "lifers" will begin to dominate PC operations given their longevity and "institutional knowledge," resulting in cynicism and hard feelings among non-tenured staff. Returned Volunteers also fear that over the next few years the increasing numbers and influence of safety and security employees not subject to the five-year rule will change the nature of the Peace Corps.

HUGH PICKENS,  
Publisher, *Peace Corps Online*,  
Baltimore, MD.

Senator COLEMAN. Senator Voinovich.

Senator VOINOVICH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You were saying that the incidents of violence are down. Is there any area of the world where incidents of violence are up?

Mr. VASQUEZ. Again, Senator, I think the area of the Inter-America/Pacific Region is an area where we have seen an increase, a slight increase. I cannot offer you specific numbers right now, but

that is the region where we have seen some slight increases, and we are taking steps to address some of the issues, some of the considerations, and to evaluate what we might be able to change or do differently to reduce and minimize the impact on volunteers.

Senator VOINOVICH. How many volunteers do we have that are in Muslim countries?

Mr. VASQUEZ. Approximately 20 to 22 percent of the volunteers serving in the Peace Corps are serving in Muslim countries.

Senator VOINOVICH. Have you noticed any increase in incidents since 9/11?

Mr. VASQUEZ. No, Senator, none whatsoever. No variation in terms of occurrences.

Senator VOINOVICH. In other words, the fact that there are Peace Corps volunteers in a Muslim country has not been a source of irritation in terms of their presence there? There has been some feeling of secularism, bringing values that are not consistent with the faith of the individuals that are there.

Mr. VASQUEZ. No, sir, on the contrary. There has been tremendous support. Last year we reentered or entered Azerbaijan, Albania, and Chad, countries that are Muslim countries, and I just returned from a visit to Azerbaijan and our program has had a tremendous launch in that country, enjoying great success, embraced by governmental leaders, embraced by communities. The volunteers have been on the ground for about 4 months and have received a tremendous welcome in that country, and we continue to see that pattern throughout. So we have seen no impacts, and we do monitor very, very closely all countries in Peace Corps, but we monitor countries throughout the world. In this instance, we note no events or occurrences that would cause us concern.

Senator VOINOVICH. I am interested in it. If you have got any extra information on it and can make it available, I would appreciate it because I think that that is a wonderful area where we can, with the growing fundamentalism and some extremism, have an outreach of people going into these countries and spending time with individuals, again bringing to them what our value system is, which I think is very, very important and could be a real area for some real good initiative in terms of breaking down some of the misconceptions that we have been seeing lately around the world.

[Additional information submitted by Mr. Vasquez follows:]

#### PEACE CORPS PROGRAMS IN PREDOMINANTLY MUSLIM COUNTRIES—AN OVERVIEW

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

As is true throughout the world, our potential to expand into additional countries with Muslim populations is dependent on a written expression of interest from a senior host government representative, a positive in-country assessment, and available resources. The funding must be available to support administrative start-up,

training, and Volunteer program support. The inviting country must meet safety and security criteria, including a stable operational environment; access to effective and reliable communications; available, safe and affordable housing; access to essential services, such as health care and banking; and access to evacuation logistical support.

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

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

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

Senator VOINOVICH. I would also like to see the change in orientation that you have, if you have got a piece of paper on what the orientation was before you came in and what the orientation is now, just to get a feel for how it has been changed.

[Additional information submitted by Mr. Vasquez follows:]

#### ADDITIONAL "ORIENTATION" ON SAFETY AND SECURITY

Staging is the two-day orientation for Peace Corps trainees that takes place in the United States prior to departing for their host country. In the summer of 2002, the Peace Corps extended staging from a one-day to a two-day orientation and developed a new accompanying curriculum to focus almost exclusively on safety and security and the importance of personal responsibility. This reinforces the themes articulated during the application process and flows directly to the two to three months of intense pre-service training that follows. The staging includes training on:

- Peace Corps' overall approach to safety and security;
- Awareness of policies and procedures that must be followed;
- Acceptance of cultural differences that exist and willingness to make adjustments;
- Awareness of risks and how they can be managed; and
- Understanding that Volunteers, Peace Corps staff, community have specific responsibilities for Volunteer safety.

In addition to the information provided by recruiters and others in the application process thus far, the staging kit that is sent out several weeks prior to staging now contains a Peace Corps document entitled "Approach to Safety and Security" that outlines key points on safety and risk management.

Another new component to staging is the presence of a representative from the Country Desk Unit throughout the staging event. Not only is this individual a key contact for Volunteers and their families, but the Country Desk representative is available to provide country-specific information for trainees on expectations, cultural sensitivities, and security incidents.

Senator VOINOVICH. Do you keep track of how often contacts are made with individuals who are serving? Do you have statistics on that? How often does the country director or associate country director communicate with an individual?

Mr. VASQUEZ. Just for clarification, Senator, contact with the volunteers?

Senator VOINOVICH. Yes. Once a week, once a month, once every 6 months? You say you have got the new safety and security people

and you have got them out around the world, but I would be interested in knowing just how often do they have that contact.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Well, if I may respond very briefly, first of all, there are minimum standards that are established by Peace Corps, that a volunteer must be visited at least two times during the first year, one time during the second year. That is minimal guidelines.

What is more important to note is that throughout the year the trainers, the staff, the support staff, the medical staff, and other staff within that country will visit with the volunteers. So there is probably in most countries a greater frequency of that. There are volunteer leaders, what we call wardens, individuals who are volunteers but who are responsible for a certain area in the context of safety and security, the interaction with the host organization or the partners, the collaborators with whom the volunteers work.

So there is a frequency of interaction, and although at first glance the minimal guidelines may seem few and far between in terms of twice a year, the fact of the matter is that the staff within country, beyond just the country director, interact with volunteers on an ongoing basis. So the frequency may be higher, depending on the volunteer, depending on the kind of work and the proximity of the volunteer.

Senator VOINOVICH. I am not really interested in having every move monitored or statistic kept track of, but if I gave you the names of two or three individuals and asked you, could you let me know how often they have been contacted? Could you do that?

Mr. VASQUEZ. I suspect we could provide you some fairly accurate information on that.

Senator VOINOVICH. So you would have a pretty good idea. You would have a file on an individual and in that file would be information regarding how often they had visited?

Mr. VASQUEZ. I do not know specifically how a country would keep a specific file on a volunteer, but I could certainly provide that information to you.

Senator VOINOVICH. In terms of the issue of communication, since you have been there, is there a requirement that there be communication, that they have to be available?

Mr. VASQUEZ. Yes, Senator. There is a requirement not only that we have a communications plan in place within our emergency action plan. Maybe I can take a moment here. Every country is required to have an emergency action plan. That plan is developed and designed to deal with any and all scenarios that may develop in a country. I will cite the six evacuations that have been conducted on my watch. It has ranged everything from countries like Madagascar to Cote d'Ivoire, to the SARS situation in China. Every one of those countries, every one of those evacuations was successful in great part because our communications plans worked because when we approve an evacuation, we exercise that communications plan to let the volunteers know that they are either to consolidate or they are going to need to prepare to leave country for emergency reasons.

So we do have a communications plan in every country. It is tested to ensure that it is in place, that it works. Perhaps most importantly, in response to the General Accounting Office concern about some inconsistency, we now ensure that all of our posts are compli-



ant and that they all meet the standards so that we minimize; and frankly, our goal is to eliminate any inconsistencies that may occur. We require our posts to test their plan, to ensure that it works, and when it does not work, to take corrective action where appropriate.

Senator VOINOVICH. But fundamentally they have got better communications than they did before you came on board.

Mr. VASQUEZ. I believe so, Senator. If I may just add. Of course, as I mentioned earlier in my testimony, cellular technology has evolved almost on a monthly basis in some countries. So as that net of communication expands, then it gives us an opportunity to create one more layer of communication and a greater linkage. Frankly, I would not take credit for the evolution of the cellular technology, but it sure is helping us.

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you, Senator Voinovich.

We are going to do a 5-minute follow-up round of questioning.

Director Vasquez, I want to talk a little bit about the 5-year rule. I understand Senator Sarbanes also had some concerns about that. In your testimony, you noted that there were 23 exemptions, 19 of which are safety related. I will lay out the questions and then you can answer them in whatever order you see fit.

One, I would like to understand what is the rationale is. Second, the exemptions. Have those been done by executive order? Is there any legislation needed to deal with this 5-year rule? Specifically talk to me about the impact it has on volunteer safety.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Well, Mr. Chairman, 2 years ago in our appropriations bill, language was included that authorized the Director of the Peace Corps to exempt employees who worked in safety and security from the 5-year rule. Conceptually the 5-year rule has been viewed as a way of generating a turnover or a rotation in Peace Corps that keeps the agency, as some have described it, fresh, energized. It minimizes the chances of an entrenched bureaucracy from taking hold and therefore maybe minimizing or affecting the creativity that I think makes the Peace Corps such a unique agency and such a unique organization.

However, the 5-year rule—and as I have said to some folks, there are some days I wake up and I think it is terrific, and there are other days I wake up and I think it could use some changes because what you do lose in the process in some cases is institutional memory, some continuity. In fact, in some cases, you lose talent that may contemplate or consider coming to work at Peace Corps, but we lose some candidates because they do not want to be bound to a limitation of service.

So with safety and security, we conducted an evaluation and identified 23 positions that we know to be fully dedicated to volunteer safety and security. Those positions have now been cleared to be exempt from the 5-year rule.

The second wave gets a little more complicated, and that is why in my testimony I pointed out that we have retained a third party consultant to do an evaluation and provide us some criteria and recommendations on what the second grouping should be of those who should be exempt from the 5-year rule. Is it someone whose job is 20 percent safety and security, 30 percent, 50 percent, 60 percent? We need some clarity on those kinds of things. So we are conducting that evaluation, and as soon as that report is available,

it is my intention to review and, where appropriate, approve those positions.

Senator COLEMAN. Please keep us posted on the progress of that study. I would like to have that information as soon as possible.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Certainly.

Senator COLEMAN. I would like to talk just a little bit about female volunteers. The GAO report found that I think more than a third of female volunteers report sexual harassment on a monthly basis. Have you found that single female volunteers posted alone suffer more incidents of sexual assaults and are there any extra self-defense measures that are taken to protect these volunteers?

Mr. VASQUEZ. On the first question, the issue of women in the Peace Corps, we have seen an increase in the number of women in the Peace Corps. Up to about 60 percent of all of the volunteers today are women. Consequently we have revised our training components at the training level, when volunteers come into service initially during that first training phase, to address and provide information to women volunteers about some of the conditions and circumstances that they may confront and face during the course of working, living in a community, and commuting in a community. So we try to put some information on the table so that that is available. We are continually providing in-service training to be responsive to that.

In terms of the statistics on victimization, on sexual harassment, or comments, cat calls, and other things like that, it is on a country-by-country basis, and I really could not provide you, although we can do some research and provide maybe a more narrow profile, but based on the statistics that I have reviewed, it varies from country to country. But we try to respond to that with ongoing training.

Senator COLEMAN. Does this training include self-defense training?

Mr. VASQUEZ. I was going to comment that the subject comes up from time to time. I will tell you that having been in law enforcement and having been an officer who designed a program that every high school girl or woman in my community back in California received as training, our emphasis was not self-defense. Our emphasis was crime prevention. Our emphasis was about managing self in terms of circumstances, being aware of your surroundings. Prevention, frankly, at least in my mind, having taught that area, is about crime prevention because there is a high risk or an element of risk that when someone resists a purse snatch or some other crime, unless you are very, very well trained and you have maintained your capacity to respond physically, there could be some peril, which then could complicate a situation and frankly make it worse than the initial encounter. So we are not averse to it, but I think there would be some pretty extensive studies and evaluation that would need to be conducted in light of some of the risks that are tied to "self-defense."

Senator COLEMAN. So I am clear then, you mean self-protection in a broader context, being aware of your surroundings, making sure that you are not distracted. Oftentimes a lot of incidents occur when people are on cell phones. That kind of broader self-protection, is that provided then on a regular basis?

Mr. VASQUEZ. It is part of our training to talk about the kinds of risks that volunteers are subjected to when they are on public transportation systems in their communities. There are communities where the volunteers set up an alarm system, a notification system, whether it be a whistle, whether it be a verbal signal. Women volunteers have shared with me that they have a system set up in their host community so that if they are in a small community and they are living with a host family—and a considerable percentage do—then they have a system set up so that when that whistle or some other signal is activated, the family knows to respond or knows that the volunteer may need some assistance or may be in distress. So there are different things that are talked about, things that are shared with volunteers, practices that have worked successfully both at work, at home, and while in public places, and that is done frequently.

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you.

Senator Dodd.

Senator DODD. Thanks very much.

I think your point, Mr. Director, is a very good one on prevention. I think that makes the most sense.

I was just going down the summary, just to pick up on the Chairman's questions. Again, there is nothing worse than people who go back, "when I was in school, we walked barefoot." So I will preface my comments.

When I was a volunteer, I think the male to female ration was 2 to 1. I think those numbers are right. Back in the earlier days of the Peace Corps, the majority of volunteers were male. There has been a significant change in the profile of a volunteer today. As you point out, 60 percent are women.

But I was intrigued going down these numbers of the trends in the 2002 safety report. On the sexual assaults, in more than 44 percent of the incidents it was a friend or an acquaintance of the victim. The volunteer was alone with the assailant in 86 percent of the cases. Those two statistics seem to jump out. The point being that I do not know what the profile looks like today. I am sure it varies from country to country, but the idea of having pairs of volunteers, particularly with women, in more remote areas or places where there is going to be less opportunity for people to come and respond to whistles or whatever the prevention mechanisms you suggest. I would be curious whether or not the data supports this. Whereas in more congested areas where there are apt to be people who can hear something going on, you may have less of a problem. It just is raised as a point of interest. The tandem approach with people who may be more vulnerable to attack may do a lot to reduce the incidents of it.

I do not know if that is part of the practices or not. Is it part of that today, or how do you look at that? You do not make decisions on where to locate volunteers based on that at all?

Mr. VASQUEZ. Senator, what we do is we provide very specific guidance to the posts and to the staff in country as to what the expectations should be and what the standards should be for housing and locating a volunteer. Typically, before a volunteer lives at his or her site, assuming they are not going to live with a host family (and a considerable percentage do), every volunteer lives with a

host family initially until they have identified a location for permanent housing.

The numbers of volunteers who find their housing satisfactory and safe is again in the 90th percentile. So I think our approach is working in the context that we do not just send a volunteer, man or woman, to a community and say, well, go out and find some housing, you are on your own. We place them first with a host family in the community so that they get the opportunity to—

Senator DODD. No. I understood that. I am talking about actually pairing up volunteers in more remote areas where—in fact, these numbers are holding up—where you get people alone—that the assailant is a known person to the victim, it seems to me that, where possible, having tandem volunteers serving in an area makes more sense than not. That is the general point I am making. Obviously, there are exceptions to this, but I am just wondering, given the high rate of women as volunteers today, whether or not that is a presumption we try to make and whether or not that actually might reduce the number of assaults we are seeing in the sexually related area.

Mr. VASQUEZ. We do not have information that would suggest to us—

Senator DODD. I am curious about that.

Mr. VASQUEZ (continuing).—that doubling volunteers, or clustering, as they call it, would impact the numbers.

Senator DODD. Let me raise that as a question for you and maybe you can get back and give us some sense of that.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Certainly.

[Additional information submitted by Mr. Vasquez follows:]

RESEARCH ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONTACT WITH OTHER VOLUNTEERS AND VOLUNTEER SAFETY (PAIRING)

In the bi-annual Volunteer survey, we ask questions about the overall Volunteer experience including questions about perceptions of safety. The results from the most recent survey (2002) show the following:

- Volunteers feel increasingly safe the smaller the community in which they live and work, and this trend is quite significant. They feel most safe on islands and in small villages, and least safe in capital cities.
- There is a correlation between Volunteers feeling less safe in capital cities and the frequency of seeing other Volunteers. The more they see other Volunteers, the less safe they feel in capital cities.
- There is a correlation between Volunteers feeling integrated into their communities and the frequency of seeing other Volunteers. The more they see other Volunteers the less integrated they feel in their communities—a key safety factor.
- There is a correlation between Volunteers reporting sexual or racial harassment and the frequency of seeing other Volunteers. The more they see other Volunteers, the more frequently they report sexual or racial harassment.

Senator DODD. I also want to raise—I will not ask for a response to this—the issue of the 5-year rule. I am a strong supporter of it. We have obviously made exceptions over the years. Loret Ruppe is an example where a director served—I forget how many years—I think it was 8 years and did an incredible job, by the way, just a remarkable director. I know you know that as well. So I am not rigid about the rule, but I always like it to be that the presumption is in favor of the rule and you have really got to make a strong

case to overcome that presumption. But there is a concern being raised that if we begin to expand this, you end up having an entrenched bureaucracy in the Peace Corps, which can overwhelm the agency, and the vitality of the Peace Corps in no small measure I think is attributed to the fact that there has been this turnover every 5 years. It has maintained a lot of its youthfulness, if you will, as an organization. So I just raise that.

Quickly before my time runs out, I want to raise a couple of things. One, the GAO report here on page 3 of the report says, we reported that the Peace Corps headquarters had developed a safety and security framework but that the field's implementation of the framework had produced varying results. And they go down to the last sentence of that paragraph saying, however, recent Inspector General reports indicate that safety and security shortcomings in the field are still occurring.

So I commend you for what you are doing, obviously, in trying to establish a plan. It seems to me we have got to try to follow up to make sure that the implementation is occurring at the field level. Again, this is difficult. The success of a volunteer is their ability to connect and relate to a community and if they become overly burdened with security, it makes it awfully difficult to get the job done. So striking that balance is not an easy challenge, I admit, but I would encourage you to sort of follow up with that field to get reports back on how we can enhance that security.

Secondly or thirdly—and this I do want a quick answer to, if you could give it to us. One is how much do you think this may cost. The bills that have been introduced by our colleagues, Senators DeWine and Durbin, call for security people. You may have asked this already, but I would be interested in whether or not you have made an assessment of what the cost of the Peace Corps would be if you were to fulfill the DeWine-Durbin requirements on security in their legislation.

Lastly, one provision of their bill calls for the Peace Corps to assign its own security officer to each country. I wonder if you think this is an appropriate post for the Peace Corps to fill.

Mr. VASQUEZ. On the first part of your question, Senator, were you asking about the cost implications of the whole bill or specific to—

Senator DODD. Specific to the security piece.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Well, one of the elements that has been talked about and proposed is the idea of American hires serving as the safety and security coordinators in each of our posts. We have not run the numbers on those costs, but just on its face they would be significant, very, very significant.

Senator DODD. Is that security through our embassy there or separate?

Mr. VASQUEZ. No. The safety and security coordinators are newly created positions—

Senator DODD. Within the Peace Corps.

Mr. VASQUEZ (continuing).—for Peace Corps.

Senator DODD. Only Peace Corps.

Mr. VASQUEZ. That is correct.

Senator DODD. No connection with the U.S. embassy.

Mr. VASQUEZ. No. Exclusively dedicated to the Peace Corps and to volunteer safety at each post.

The benefit of having host country nationals in those positions—and although we do have some Americans, in fact, return Peace Corps volunteers who are serving in those positions now, but the fact is that many of them are host country nationals who have been in law enforcement, who know the country, who know the system, who know the geography, who know the infrastructure, who know the criminal justice system, and they bring tremendous knowledge to the table, and they provide us some very, very good guidance and some good perspective on how to manage safety and security in a host country.

On your first comment, we have not run specific numbers, but on its face, it would be very, very substantial costs for the Peace Corps.

Senator DODD. I think it would be helpful for us to get that because I think Senators DeWine and Durbin have raised a good point with their bill. We are obviously going to be asked about it. It would be very helpful to get from the Peace Corps what the costs are that we are talking about here. If you are going to simultaneously increase the number of volunteers in the field, then we better have some feel of what that is going to cost, not only what it would cost today, but I would like you to match those numbers up with increases so we have an overall sense of this thing or everything is going to suffer as a result, both security as well as recruitment, if that is our goal.

Thanks.

[Additional information submitted in response to Senator Dodd's question follows:]

#### PEACE CORPS SAFETY AND SECURITY COORDINATORS

*The cost of adding 74 direct American hires at each post in FY 2005 = \$14.8 million.*

(This includes all 71 posts, the opening of the Mexico program this fall & the addition of two new countries in FY 2005.) In subsequent years, this cost would only increase. To put this amount in context—the Peace Corps' current budget is \$308 million for FY 2004. The agency received a \$13 million increase from FY 2003, which was \$51 million below the President's request.

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

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

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

the in-country staff to perform the security related functions required to adequately prepare for any routine or emergency safety situation.

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

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you, Senator Dodd.

Senator Voinovich.

Senator VOINOVICH. I just have one question. Have you changed the examination of the host families since you have been on board in terms of the procedure that is used to determine reliability of the families that your volunteers are going into?

Mr. VASQUEZ. The host families are screened and evaluated on a country-by-country basis, and the procedures and the processes that we have put in place include—

Senator VOINOVICH. Does the Peace Corps do the evaluation, not the host country? The Peace Corps does the evaluation?

Mr. VASQUEZ. The Peace Corps staff in the host country, the country director and the supporting staff in the Peace Corps country do an evaluation of the family and do the evaluation of the site, taking into account that safety and security is a very, very important aspect of where we place volunteers with host families. That is absolutely a component.

Senator VOINOVICH. Is there a tendency to have a repetition of families? In other words, in a country where we have been for 10-15 years, families continue to participate in the program?

Mr. VASQUEZ. Senator, I do not have specific information on that. I would be glad to follow up with information on that specifically because, again, I suspect, as has happened so often in Peace Corps, because our countries are so varied and conditions and circumstances are so varied, there are variations on that, and there are probably some families who have been supporting Peace Corps volunteers for years and there are others who may rotate in and out of the process.

[Additional information submitted by Mr. Vasquez follows:]

#### PLACEMENT OF VOLUNTEERS WITH HOST FAMILIES AFTER A SECURITY INCIDENT

All Peace Corps posts have established and maintain site history files. This is an important part of the compliance mechanism for manual Section 270, related to safety and security. The site history files contain information on site assessments and site visits, as well as reported security incidents. Thus, if the Peace Corps has records to indicate that a security incident has taken place that involves a specific host family; the Peace Corps will ensure that Volunteers will not be placed with that family. If the situation warrants, not only will the Peace Corps refrain from placing Volunteers with the host family, but also in the community in which the incident occurred.

Senator VOINOVICH. In this article in the *Dayton Daily News*, Kevin Leville of Ventura, California reported that he had been burglarized three times during his service, and they were all reported to the Peace Corps staff and nothing happened. Ultimately the place was broken into and he was beaten to death. If you get complaints like this, how fast do you respond to them?

Mr. VASQUEZ. Well, Senator, first, I place expectations with my country directors, and I have made it very clear and I have spoken with every country director in Peace Corps. I interview the can-

didates for country directors one on one. They are my selection, and I make it very clear that I have expectations, that they understand that we are a volunteer-based organization and the volunteer is number one.

They also understand or should understand, because it is articulated, that if a volunteer has issues relative to safety or security, or where the fulfillment of the opportunity to be a good Peace Corps volunteer is not being met, I have an expectation that the country director and staff will be responsive to that volunteer. With the enhancement of a safety and security coordinator, we now have additional staff that can also address safety and security issues when that volunteer feels that safety and security is not to the standards that he or she expects.

My test is that when a volunteer's work is disrupted, interrupted or distracted, then we are not doing our job, and we try to be responsive. When volunteers let us know and when they communicate with us, my expectation is that the country staff be responsive to the needs of a volunteer when a site, when a job, and expectations are not being met.

Senator VOINOVICH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you, Senator Voinovich.

Director Vasquez, I want to thank you for your testimony, and I want to thank you for your leadership.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator COLEMAN. What we are going to do is we are going to combine the next two panels. So our next panel will be Mr. Jess Ford, Director, International Affairs and Trade at U.S. General Accounting Office; Mr. Kevin Quigley, President, National Peace Corps Association, Washington, D.C.; Ms. Cynthia Threlkeld, Guatemala Country Director, Peace Corps; and Ms. Gladys Maloy, former Peace Corps Romania volunteer.

I do anticipate that we have a series of votes around 11:15. So what we will do is we will begin the testimony. If votes come up, we will recess, then come back and finish. We will start with Mr. Ford, then followed by Mr. Quigley, Ms. Threlkeld. And do I pronounce it right? Is it Maloy?

Ms. MALOY. Maloy.

Senator COLEMAN. The usual pronunciation.

We will start from there. Note that we have a timing system, and when it gets to amber, please sum up. If you have written statements, they will be entered into the record as a whole. Let us start with Mr. Ford.

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

Mr. FORD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee. I am pleased to be here today to discuss GAO's work on Peace Corps' efforts to improve safety and security of its volunteers.

My testimony today will summarize and update, where possible, key findings from our July 2002 examination and report that touched on three main topics: first, that we discuss the trends in crime against volunteers in the agency's system for generating such information; we discuss the Peace Corps's field implementation of



its safety and security framework; and we discuss the underlying factors that contributed to the Peace Corps' performance in the field. I will also discuss recent actions that the Peace Corps has taken to improve the safety and security of its volunteers since we issued our report.

The Peace Corps-reported rates for most types of assaults have increased since the Peace Corps began collecting such data in 1990. For example, the reported incidence rate for major physical assaults nearly doubled from an average of about 9 per 1,000 volunteer-years to about 17 per 1,000 volunteer-years up through 2002. The full extent of crime against Peace Corps volunteers is unknown because there is significant under-reporting of crime by volunteers.

We reported that the Peace Corps had initiated efforts to encourage reporting and collect additional data but that there were also unrealized opportunities for additional examination of security information. For example, our analysis showed that newer volunteers may be more likely to become victims of crime than the more experienced colleagues.

In response to our findings, the Peace Corps hired an analyst to enhance its capacity for analyzing crime data. The analyst is focused on upgrading the crime data system in the Peace Corps and has shifted responsibility for the data collection and analysis to its new Office of Safety and Security. According to the analyst, additional crime analyses have not yet been fully conducted, but they are currently in the process of looking at new ways to examine the information that they obtain in order to try to prevent future crime accidents.

We reported that Peace Corps headquarters had developed a safety and security framework, but that the field's implementation of the field work had produced varying results. While volunteers are generally satisfied with the agency's training programs, there was mixed performance in key elements of the framework, such as developing safe and secure housing sites, monitoring volunteers, and planning for emergencies. For example, in each of the five posts we visited, we found instances of volunteers who began their service in housing that had not been fully inspected and had not met Peace Corps guidelines. We also found variation in the frequency of staff contact with volunteers and in the Peace Corps' responsiveness to volunteers' concerns about safety and security.

To improve safety and security practices in the field, in 2002 the Peace Corps increased the number of field-based safety and security officers charged with reviewing post practices and assisted them in making improvements in their frameworks in the field. The Peace Corps has recently hired a compliance officer charged with independently assessing each post's compliance with the framework.

We reported that a number of factors, including staff turnover, informal supervision and oversight mechanisms, and unclear guidance, hampered the Peace Corps' efforts to ensure high quality performance for the agency as a whole. For example, the Peace Corps reported high staff turnover caused in part by the agency's statutorily imposed 5-year limit on employment had resulted in a lack of institutional memory, producing a situation in which agency staff were continually reinventing the wheel.

We recommended that the Peace Corps address this issue. Recently Congress has granted the Peace Corps authority to exempt safety and security staff from the 5-year rule. The Peace Corps has exempted 23 staff positions, and it is currently examining the feasibility of exempting others as well.

To strengthen supervision and oversight, the Peace Corps has created an Office of Safety and Security and has centralized safety and security functions under a senior manager. The office is supported by a staff member in each of the three regional bureaus and a compliance office and has nine field-based security officers.

In response to our recommendations, the Peace Corps is revising its current security framework and procedures and is currently developing new ways to measure security in the field to prevent further problems.

In conclusion, since we issued our report in July of 2002, the Peace Corps has taken several actions to improve safety and security of its volunteers. The Peace Corps is still in the process of implementing many of these actions, which are designed to improve the overall environment that volunteers must work under.

That concludes my opening statement. I would be happy to answer any questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Ford follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JESS T. FORD

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to be here to discuss Peace Corps' efforts to ensure the safety and security of its volunteers. My testimony is based on our July 2002 report, information we obtained from the Peace Corps to update our analysis, and recent testimony before the House of Representatives.<sup>1</sup>

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

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

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

- analyzed Peace Corps' crime data;
- reviewed agency-wide safety and security policies, guidelines, training materials, volunteer satisfaction surveys, and Inspector General reports;

<sup>1</sup>U.S. General Accounting Office, GAO-02-818, *Peace Corps: Initiatives for Addressing Safety and Security Challenges Hold Promise, But Progress Should be Assessed* (Washington, D.C.: July 25, 2002); and GAO-04-600T, *Peace Corps: Status of Initiatives to Improve Volunteer Safety and Security* (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 24, 2004). We reported separately on events surrounding one specific security incident—the disappearance of a volunteer in Bolivia in early 2001. See, *The Peace Corps Failed to Properly Supervise Missing Volunteer and Lost Track of Him*, GAO-01-970R (Washington, D.C.: July 20, 2001).

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

- interviewed key staff and more than 150 volunteers; and
- examined practices for selecting volunteer sites, developing emergency action plans, and performing other tasks.

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

In summary, we found the following:

Peace Corps' reported incidence rates of crimes committed against volunteers have remained essentially unchanged since we last reported.<sup>3</sup> Reported rates for most types of assaults have increased since Peace Corps began collecting data in 1990, but reported rates have stabilized in recent years. For example, the reported incidence rate for major physical assaults nearly doubled from an average of about 9 per 1,000 volunteer years in 1991–1993 to an average of about 17 per 1,000 volunteer years<sup>4</sup> in 1998–2000. Data for 2001 and 2002 show that this rate has not changed. The full extent of crime against Peace Corps volunteers is unknown because there is significant underreporting of crime by volunteers. We reported that Peace Corps had initiated efforts to encourage reporting and collect additional data but that there were also other unrealized opportunities for additional examination of data. For example, our analysis showed that newer volunteers may be more likely to become victims of crime than their more experienced colleagues. In response to our findings, in April 2003, Peace Corps hired an analyst to enhance its capacity for gathering and analyzing crime data. The analyst has focused on upgrading the crime data system and shifting the responsibility for data collection and analysis from the medical office to the newly created safety and security office, to place the responsibility for crime data in an office dedicated to safety and security. According to the analyst, additional crime analyses have not yet been conducted, as the focus has been on upgrading the process for collecting and reporting data.

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

We reported that a number of factors, including staff turnover, informal supervision and oversight mechanisms, and unclear guidance hampered Peace Corps' efforts to ensure high-quality performance for the agency as a whole. For example, Peace Corps reported that high staff turnover, caused in part by the agency's statutorily imposed 5-year limit on employment for U.S. direct hire staff, had resulted in a lack of institutional memory, producing a situation in which agency staff are continually "reinventing the wheel."<sup>5</sup> We made a recommendation that Peace Corps develop a strategy to address staff turnover, including an assessment of the "5-year rule"—a statutory restriction on the tenure of U.S. direct hire employees.<sup>5</sup> In response to our recommendation on staff turnover and the difficulties it created, Peace Corps was granted authority to exempt safety and security staff from the 5-year rule. The agency has exempted 23 staff positions from the 5-year rule and plans to conduct a study to determine whether there are additional positions that should be exempted. To strengthen supervision and oversight, Peace Corps created an office

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

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

<sup>5</sup>See U.S.C. 2506(a)(5), (6) and Public Law 108–7, the Consolidated Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2003, as well as Public Law 108–199, the Consolidated Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2004. This and other issues are addressed in H.R. 4060, passed June 1, 2004. The bill has not been passed by the Senate as of June 22, 2004.

of safety and security that centralizes safety and security functions under an associate directorship. The office is supported by a staff member in each of the three regional bureaus, a compliance officer, an analyst, and nine field-based security officers. We also recommended that Peace Corps develop performance indicators and report on its safety and security initiatives. The agency is still clarifying its guidance on how to apply its revised framework, revising its indicators of progress, and establishing a base line for judging performance in all areas of safety and security.

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

#### *Background*

Created in 1961, Peace Corps is mandated by statute to help meet developing countries' needs for trained manpower while promoting mutual understanding between Americans and other peoples. Volunteers commit to 2-year assignments in host communities, where they work on projects such as teaching English, strengthening farmer cooperatives, or building sanitation systems. By developing relationships with members of the communities in which they live and work, volunteers contribute to greater intercultural understanding between Americans and host country nationals. Volunteers are expected to maintain a standard of living similar to that of their host community colleagues and co-workers. They are provided with stipends that are based on local living costs and housing similar to their hosts. Volunteers are not supplied with vehicles. Although the Peace Corps accepts older volunteers and has made a conscious effort to recruit minorities, the current volunteer population has a median age of 25 years and is 85 percent white. More than 60 percent of the volunteers are women.

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

#### *Reported Crime Incidents Have Increased, But Full Extent of Crime Against Volunteers Remains Unknown*

Reported incidence rates of crime against volunteers have remained essentially unchanged since we completed our report in 2002.<sup>6</sup> Reported incidence rates for most types of assaults have increased since Peace Corps began collecting data in 1990, but have stabilized in recent years. The reported incidence rate for major physical assaults has nearly doubled, averaging about 9 assaults per 1,000 volunteer years in 1991–1993 and averaging about 17 assaults in 1998–2000. Reported incidence rates for major assaults remained unchanged over the next 2 years. Reported incidence rates of major sexual assaults have decreased slightly, averaging about 10 per 1,000 female volunteer years in 1991–1993 and about 8 per 1,000 female volunteer years in 1998–2000. Reported incidence rates for major sexual assaults averaged about 9 per 1,000 female volunteer years in 2001–2002.

Peace Corps' system for gathering and analyzing data on crime against volunteers has produced useful insights, but we reported in 2002 that steps could be taken to enhance the system. Peace Corps officials agreed that reported increases are difficult to interpret; the data could reflect actual increases in assaults, better efforts to ensure that agency staff report all assaults, and/or an increased willingness among volunteers to report incidents. The full extent of crime against volunteers, however, is unknown because of significant underreporting. Through its volunteer

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

satisfaction surveys, Peace Corps is aware that a significant number of volunteers do not report incidents, thus reducing the agency's ability to state crime rates with certainty. For example, according to the agency's 1998 survey, volunteers did not report 60 percent of rapes and 20 percent of non-rape sexual assaults. Reasons cited for not reporting include embarrassment, fear of repercussions, confidentiality concerns, and a belief that Peace Corps could not help.

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

#### *Efforts to Improve Data Collection and Analysis Are in Process*

Since we issued our report, Peace Corps has taken steps to strengthen its efforts for gathering and analyzing crime data. The agency has hired an analyst responsible for maintaining the agency's crime data collection system, analyzing the information collected, and publishing the results for the purpose of influencing volunteer safety and security policies. Since joining the agency a year ago, the analyst has focused on redesigning the agency's incident reporting form to provide better information on victims, assailants, and incidents and preparing a new data management system that will ease access to and analysis of crime information. However, these new systems have not yet been put into operation. The analyst stated that the reporting protocol and data management system are to be introduced this summer, and responsibility for crime data collection and analysis will be transferred from the medical office to the safety and security office. According to the analyst, she has not yet performed any new data analyses because her focus to date has been on upgrading the system.

#### *Safety and Security Framework Unevenly Implemented in the Field*

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

#### *Volunteers Are Generally Satisfied with Training*

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

#### *Mixed Performance in Housing, Monitoring Volunteers, and Emergency Action Plans*

Peace Corps' policies call for posts to ensure that housing is inspected and meets post safety and security criteria before the volunteers arrive to take up residence.

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

We found variations in the frequency of staff contact with volunteers, although many of the volunteers at the posts we visited said they were satisfied with the frequency of staff visits to their sites, and a 1998 volunteer satisfaction survey reported that about two-thirds of volunteers said the frequency of visits was adequate or better. However, volunteers had mixed views about Peace Corps' responsiveness to safety and security concerns and criminal incidents. The few volunteers we spoke with who said they were victims of assault expressed satisfaction with staff response when they reported the incidents. However, at four of the five posts we visited, some volunteers described instances in which staff were unsupportive when the volunteers reported safety concerns. For example, one volunteer said she informed Peace Corps several times that she needed a new housing arrangement because her doorman repeatedly locked her in or out of her dormitory. The volunteer said staff were unresponsive, and she had to find new housing without the Peace Corps' assistance.

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

#### *Actions Taken to Improve Field Compliance, but Implementation Still Uneven*

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

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

#### *Underlying Factors Contributed to Uneven Field Implementation, but Agency Has Taken Steps to Improve Performance*

In our 2002 report, we identified a number of factors that hampered Peace Corps efforts to ensure that this framework produced high-quality performance for the

agency as a whole. These included high staff turnover, uneven application of supervision and oversight mechanisms, and unclear guidance. We also noted that Peace Corps had identified a number of initiatives that could, if effectively implemented, help to address these factors. The agency has made some progress but has not completed implementation of these initiatives.

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

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

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

#### *Peace Corps Taking Steps to Address These Factors*

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

To strengthen supervision and oversight, Peace Corps has increased the number of staff tasked with safety and security responsibilities and created the office of safety and security that centralizes all security-related activities under the direction of

a newly created associate directorate for safety and security. The agency's new crime data analyst is a part of this directorate. In addition, Peace Corps has:

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

In response to our recommendation that the Peace Corps Director develop indicators to assess the effectiveness of the new initiatives and include these in the agency's annual Government Performance and Results Act reports, Peace Corps has expanded its reports to include 10 quantifiable indicators of safety and security performance.

To clarify agency guidance, Peace Corps has:

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

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

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

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



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

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 2002 REPORT

OBSERVATIONS ON VOLUNTEER SAFETY AND SECURITY

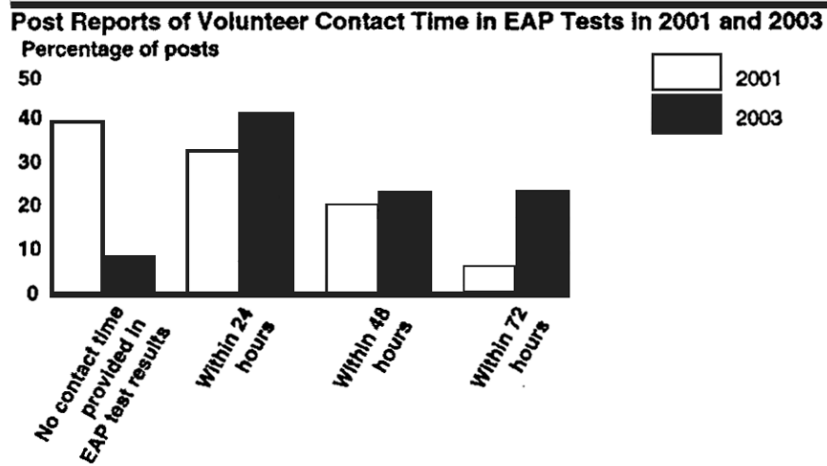
*Why GAO Did This Study*

About 7,500 Peace Corps volunteers currently serve in 70 countries. The administration intends to increase this number to about 14,000. Volunteers often live in areas with limited access to reliable communications, police, or medical services. As Americans, they may be viewed as relatively wealthy and, hence, good targets for crime. In this testimony, GAO summarizes findings from its 2002 report *Peace Corps: Initiatives for Addressing Safety and Security Challenges Hold Promise, but Progress Should be Assessed*, GAO-02-818, on (1) trends in crime against volunteers and Peace Corps' system for generating information, (2) the agency's field implementation of its safety and security framework, and (3) the underlying factors contributing to the quality of these practices.

*What GAO Found*

The full extent of crime against Peace Corps volunteers is unclear due to significant under-reporting. However, Peace Corps' reported rates for most types of assaults have increased since the agency began collecting data in 1990. The agency's data analysis has produced useful insights, but additional analyses could help improve anti-crime strategies. Peace Corps has hired an analyst to enhance data collection and analysis to help the agency develop better-informed intervention and prevention strategies.

In 2002, we reported that Peace Corps had developed safety and security policies but that efforts to implement these policies in the field had produced varying results. Some posts complied, but others fell short. Volunteers were generally satisfied with training. However, some housing did not meet standards and, while all posts had prepared and tested emergency action plans, many plans had shortcomings. Evidence suggests that agency initiatives have not yet eliminated this unevenness. The inspector general continues to find shortcomings at some posts. However, recent emergency action plan tests show an improved ability to contact volunteers in a timely manner (see figure).



**Time it took the post to contact at least 90 percent of its volunteers**

Source: GAO analysis of Peace Corps Data.

In 2002, we found that uneven supervision and oversight, staff turnover, and unclear guidance hindered efforts to ensure quality practices. The agency has taken action to address these problems. To strengthen supervision and oversight, it estab-

lished an office of safety and security, supported by three senior staff at headquarters, nine field-based safety and security officers, and a compliance officer. In response to our recommendations, Peace Corps was granted authority to exempt 23 safety and security positions from the “5-year rule”—a statutory restriction on tenure. It also adopted a framework for monitoring post compliance and quantifiable performance indicators. However, the agency is still clarifying guidance, revising indicators, and establishing a performance baseline.

*What GAO Recommends*

In 2002, to ensure that Peace Corps initiatives to improve safety and security performance would have their intended effect, GAO recommended that the agency (1) develop indicators to assess the effectiveness of these initiatives and (2) develop a strategy to address staff turnover.

The full report, *Peace Corps: Initiatives for Addressing Safety and Security Challenges Hold Promise, But Progress Should Be Assessed*, can be accessed at: [www.gao.gov/new.items/d02818.pdf](http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d02818.pdf).

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you, Mr. Ford.  
Mr. Quigley.

**STATEMENT OF KEVIN F.F. QUIGLEY, PRESIDENT, THE  
NATIONAL PEACE CORPS ASSOCIATION, WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Mr. QUIGLEY. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the subcommittee to provide something about the volunteers’ perspective on this important issue of safety and security. In addition to my written statement, I would like to submit for the record a survey that we have done of our membership and some comments from our membership about the legislation the committee is considering.

Senator COLEMAN. It will be entered, without objection.

[The survey to which Mr. Quigley referred appears following Mr. Quigley’s prepared statement.]

Mr. QUIGLEY. Thank you.

My testimony will have four parts: some background about my organization, something about my experiences, the focus on safety and security, and a summary from the membership survey on these issues.

Founded in 1979, the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) is the only national organization for Peace Corps volunteers, staff, and others whose lives have been influenced by the Peace Corps experience. In our network, there are 154 affiliates and 36,000 individuals.

Over the past 10 months, I have had the chance to talk to more than 1,000 volunteers and 30 groups about these issues of safety and security. In the Peace Corps community, there is fervent support for the Peace Corps mission despite the growing awareness about concerns for their safety and security.

My Peace Corps experience: I became a volunteer in 1976 and served for 3 years in Thailand. I arrived a month after the last U.S. soldiers stationed there during the Vietnam War departed.

My training involved three components: Thai language, teaching English as a second language, and a cross-cultural component. After 9 weeks of training, I was sent to an isolated post in Dan Sai district in Loei province, approximately 10 miles from the border with Laos in an area that was described as sensitive. Like many volunteers who had gone before me and come after me, I knew

there was some risk associated with my assignment since it was in one of the most isolated and poorest parts of the country.

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

While in Dan Sai, I was visited by Country Director Manual "Mick" Zenick, who 25 years later gave me a copy of my letter regarding his visit to my site.

Communication was by mail and since there was no phone service in my district, I would have to travel to the provincial capital 90 kilometers away. However, there was regular mail service and a yearly monitoring visit, plus periodic trips to Bangkok for training or medical purposes or ongoing Peace Corps activities to provide oversight of my experiences.

My experiences in Peace Corps, like others, involved a pattern of site assessment prior to my arrival, volunteer training, monitoring by the Peace Corps in-country staff, and emergency planning.

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

In the aftermath of September 11th, there has been growing public awareness about the needed attention to safety and security of Americans overseas, including Peace Corps volunteers. Within the community, there is a broad spectrum of opinion about these sets of issues. There is no disagreement at all about our grief for the 260 volunteers who have lost their lives in service, and we have enormous sympathy for our fellow volunteers who have experienced harm.

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

There is also concern in the community that the necessary attention to safety and security does not diminish the essential uniqueness and value of the Peace Corps experience.

Mr. Chairman, let me say a few words about the summary from our membership about some of the provisions in the legislation you are considering.

Regarding the creation of an office of ombudsman, 72 percent of the respondents to our survey endorse this.

Establishing statutorily the office of safety and security, our membership was split, 48 to 47 percent, regarding this proposal.

On the issue of volunteer posting, there was a strong sentiment in the community, despite I think Senator Dodd's very good question about whether there needs to be some adjustment in remote areas for female volunteers, 90 percent of our respondents opposed requiring that all volunteers be assigned in pairs. In my office we

conducted an informal survey among the eight former volunteers; the two who were married to their spouses, who were also volunteers, were the only two who opposed tandem pairings.

In conclusion, let me say that, Mr. Chairman, the Peace Corps community thanks you and fellow RPCV and ranking member, Senator Dodd, and members of the committee for taking a look at this important issue of safety and security. The National Peace Corps Association will work with you and the committee to ensure that these issues are addressed in a way that preserves the essence of the Peace Corps experience and best advances U.S. interests. I would also be glad to answer any questions that the committee might have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Quigley follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KEVIN QUIGLEY

Senator Coleman, my name is Kevin Quigley, President of the National Peace Corps Association. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the committee to provide the volunteers' perspective on the important issue of the safety and security of Peace Corps.

My comments fall into four general categories: background, my experience, the focus on safety and security, and the results of a survey of our membership.

BACKGROUND

The National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) is a 501(c)(3) organization founded in 1979. The NPCA is the only national organization for Peace Corps volunteers, staff, and others whose lives have been influenced by the Peace Corps experience. Our mission is to "help lead the Peace Corps community and others in fostering peace through service, education and advocacy."

In the NPCA network, there are 154 affiliates and more than 36,000 individuals who participate in our national or affiliates' activities and support our mission. These individuals reside in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The NPCA has programs to promote service, enhance understanding of other cultures, and to advocate around issues of concern to our community.

Over the past ten months since assuming this position, I have met with 30 of NPCA's affiliates and talked about the Peace Corps experience with more than a thousand former volunteers and staff. One common theme through all of these discussions is that Peace Corps service is the defining experience that continues to shape our lives. Among the community of those who have served, there is broad, deep and passionate support for Peace Corps, which often leads to ongoing service back home. This community understands the vital importance of having volunteers working overseas—as they have done in more than 130 countries—to promote peace through training individuals in their host countries, educating them about the United States, and upon their return educating Americans about the countries in which they served. This reflects Peace Corps' three goals, which are perceived as every bit as vital today as when the agency was established 43 years ago.

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

During these many conversations, I also have learned that no two of the 171,000 Americans who have served as Peace Corps volunteers have an identical experience. There are differences based on the volunteer, the country, the assignment, the era, and the people we served. There are, however, many common threads linking these experiences across the generations of volunteers regardless of the country or region of service or the nature of the assignment. These common threads include serving in often remote locations, as perhaps the only American, learning another language, living with others as friends and colleagues, and developing a deep appreciation of another culture.

Even with these many commonalities, it is difficult to generalize. So, Mr. Chairman, I would like to provide some perspective on this important safety and security issue by describing my own experience, as well as providing information resulting from a recent survey that we have done with our membership.

## MY PEACE CORPS EXPERIENCE

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

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

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

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

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

While a volunteer in Dan Sai, I was visited by the Country Director, Manuel "Mick" Zenick—who 25 years later gave me a copy of my letter regarding his visit. I was also visited by one other volunteer who lived in the provincial capital, who I would visit typically once a month. Communication was by mail since there was no phone service in my district. To make a phone call required travel to the provincial capital, 90 kilometers away. However, the mail and a yearly monitoring visit, plus periodic trips to Bangkok for training or medical purposes were sufficient to provide oversight of my activities.

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

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

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

## FOCUS ON SAFETY AND SECURITY ISSUES

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

Within this community there is a broad spectrum of opinion. However, among those of us who have served we agree that the safety and security of volunteers must be a paramount concern. All our members grieve for the 260 volunteers who

have lost their lives in service and have enormous sympathy for our fellow volunteers who have experienced harm. Whenever a tragedy occurs or whenever a volunteer is harmed we expect—in fact demand—that Peace Corps do everything humanly possible to be responsive.

There is also a sense that the discussion on safety and security misses the broader context, whether the Peace Corps experience is, relatively speaking, any more risky in terms of homicides and assaults than life for a comparable cohort in urban America, overseas development workers or for volunteers with Peace Corps' German, British, France and Japanese counterparts. Unfortunately, there is no comparison regarding what those agencies' experiences are with regard to safety and security.

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Chairman, I understand that the committee is considering legislation to address the issue of volunteer safety and security. I have had a chance to review this legislation and ask our membership about its main provisions and some of the topics you mentioned.

#### MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

Last week, we at the NPCA posted a short survey to our website to garner responses to the proposed legislation. While not necessarily scientific, the survey results and the accompanying narrative responses offer insight into the array of returned volunteer attitudes on this important topic. Following are my own views, informed by my experiences and supplemented by the results from our recent survey:

- *Office of Ombudsman.* Creating an Office of Ombudsman would be perceived by the Peace Corps community as being responsive to many former volunteers, especially those who have been harmed or become ill during their service and not received promised post-service support. They will perceive that their concerns are being addressed by a strong, vibrant mechanism advocating for their interests. Seventy-two percent of the respondents to our survey endorsed this.
- *Office of Safety and Security.* Establishing statutorily the Office of Safety and Security would underscore the Congress's concern with and commitment to en-

sure the safety and security of volunteers and recognition that these issues are a current reality and will be with us for many decades to come. This Office should be charged with notifying any volunteer victimized by crime and should also be notified about the processing of criminal charges. The respondents to our survey were equally split regarding the merits of this proposal.

- *Inspector General's Office.* Changing the status of the Inspector General by making it independent is not perceived as likely to have any appreciable effect on volunteer's safety and security. The respondents to our survey were equally split regarding the merits of this proposal.
- *Volunteer Posting.* There have been proposals to post at least two volunteers to each site or consolidate groups of volunteers. That would diminish the experience and lessen the impact of Peace Corps without necessarily enhancing the safety and security of volunteers. Two volunteers posted together tend to be less well integrated and perhaps less well accepted by the local community. Two volunteers are more likely to be perceived as able to look after each other, thus diminishing the community's need to have a stake in their safety and security. In our recent survey, 90% of the respondents opposed requiring that all volunteers be assigned in pairs.
- *Five-Year Rule.* The legislation proposes a report to Congress of the "Five-Year Rule" and the rule's potential implications on issues of recruitment, health, safety, and productive work assignments. Seventy percent of our respondents supported this provision.
- *Office of Medical Services.* The legislation calls for a report to Congress concerning medical screening processes and guidelines, as well as a statistical review of the medical appeals process. The community considers this Office critical to volunteer's safety and security and wishes to see that this Office has the resources required and the authority necessary to play its critical role. Sixty-five percent of the respondents in our survey supported this provision.
- *Provision of Cellular/Satellite Phones.* Modern technology, especially satellite and cell phones and access to the internet, provides today's volunteers a much greater ability to stay in touch with the in-country Peace Corps staff, as well as their family and friends at home. If regular access to these technologies can appreciably improve volunteers' safety and security, they should be provided at the discretion of the country director. In our survey, 67 percent of the respondents opposed requiring volunteers to have modern communication equipment.
- *Self-Defense Training.* If this training improves volunteers' safety and security, it should be offered on a voluntary basis, again at the discretion of the country director.
- *Frequency of Site Visits.* A successful Peace Corps experience does require that there be oversight of the volunteer's activities. That oversight can be accomplished through a variety of means, site visits, phone and email interactions, as well as meetings in the Peace Corps country offices and during various in-service trainings. The frequency of site visits should be determined by the country director. Legislatively mandating the frequency of site visits can not possibly recognize the vast differences between Peace Corps countries and assignments.

#### CONCLUSION

It is essential that whatever Congress does to address this issue of volunteer safety and security should not impede the fundamental mission and style of Peace Corps, which has contributed to its success over the past four decades. Peace Corps' greatest contributions have resulted from the fact that it provides Americans a relatively unique opportunity to live and work alongside our host country counterparts and live as they live. Policies that isolate volunteers from the communities they live and serve in and mandate more frequent site visits are not necessarily going to enhance the safety and security of volunteers. Equally important is that whatever Congress does on this issue should not detract from the vitally important goal of expanding the numbers of serving volunteers and that the President's 2005 budget request be met.

Senator Coleman, the Peace Corps community thanks you for addressing the issue of volunteer safety and security. The NPCA will work with you and the Committee to ensure that these issues are addressed in ways that preserve the essence of the Peace Corps mission and best advance U.S. interests. We will also work so that the President's budget request can be met, providing many more Americans with the opportunity to serve their country through the Peace Corps and to bring that experience back to America in ways that help shape our place in the world.

**National Peace Corps Association (NPCA)**  
**Survey on Peace Corps Safety/Security Legislation**

*June 9–21, 2004*

SURVEY RESULTS AND COMMENTS FROM RESPONDENTS

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Number of Respondents: 225  
 216 Respondents were returned Peace Corps volunteers (96%).  
 149 Respondents were NPCA members (66%).

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(1) *Should a Peace Corps Office of Safety and Security, with individual country security coordinators, be established by law?*

YES: 109 (48%)  
 NO: 110 (49%)

*Comments on Safety & Security Issues:*

“Having served recently, I and my fellow volunteers have noticed the rapid increase in rules that affect our service, mostly in response to Safety and Security issues. Although some of the new requirements are necessary, many of them in practice treat PCVs as children. There should be an understanding that PCVs are competent adults and professionals, and should be treated as such.”

FEMALE, *Bulgaria*, 2002–04

“Safety concerns are an important part of PC training. Accidents will happen, unfortunately, but we must not overreact.”

FEMALE, *Solomon Islands*, 1994–96

“I served as a PCV twice and as a Country Director and realize that something needs to be done to strengthen and monitor safety and security in many country programs. I would suggest that Congress tread softly with this—I realize that the Dayton newspaper reports raised serious concern—perhaps more than was merited. I would hate to think that a wonderful institution like Peace Corps could be harmed by ill-conceived legislation based on this journalism. On the other hand, all who have served in Peace Corps know that we are placed in challenging situations. We depend on the good judgment of our Country Directors, support staff in country and at HQ, our counterparts and friends and supervisors on site and our own good common sense. Legislation can only go so far to protect the PCV in the field from harm. Let us support our country programs—not second guess their safety and security PSTs, country evacuation plans, site assessments and other useful tools.”

MALE, *Sierra Leone, India, Mongolia*, 1966–68; 1969–71; 1995–99

“The issue of safety and security of Peace Corps volunteers is of the utmost importance and in my experience; I do not feel that it has been given the priority that it deserves. Creating institutions to further monitor these issues and respond to volunteer concerns are very important to ensuring the safety and security of each volunteer, so that they may then be better able to fulfill their assignments.”

FEMALE, *Western Russia*, 2000–02

“The concerns about Volunteer health and safety are always important. However, efforts by Congress to dictate Peace Corps procedures is not necessary and will be counter-productive. Congress should appropriate adequate sums to Peace Corps for operations and expansion and then leave it alone to do its job.”

MALE, *Turkey, Bulgaria, Russia, Macedonia, HQ*, 1965–79, 1994–01

“Learning the language and living with the people and within their means is the number one way to ensure security. We must maintain the grassroots approach and do the best jobs we can do so that the people will give us their respect and in turn their security.”

FEMALE, *Uzbekistan*, 2000–01



“I was one of the PCVs who was sexually assaulted during my service, and the Peace Corps acted like it was my job to adjust to the new culture. I got no help from anyone, even though my assault occurred during training by a family member of a house to which the Peace Corps assigned me to live. I question the whole family getting process, the degree of autonomy with which the trainers are permitted to work, and how the Peace Corps balances volunteer safety with the goals of the Peace Corps.”

ANONYMOUS

“Country security coordinator: The idea is good, but that all countries need their own? There is something to be said for economies of scale. Couldn't it be based on number of PVC's/staff/level of security risks, etc. vs. every country needing one?”

FEMALE, *Benin*, 2001–03

“While I understand the issues of safety and security, I do believe that the consideration must include context per country. An in country office of Safety and Security would look different in each country Peace Corps participates in and would be most appropriate and helpful to volunteers.”

FEMALE, *Guatemala*, 1987–91

“I was a PC Country Director 1992–97. During my tenure, we instituted significantly increased safety and security measures, in response to local conditions (e.g., increased crime, predictions of increased hurricane activity, political instability). I strongly believe that the respective post is in the best position to judge the needs in that country. The key is good quality staff in the field and at headquarters, not additional legislation and more bureaucracy.”

MALE, *Bolivia, Ecuador, Dominican Republic*, 1970–71, 1980–83, 1992–97

“The most useful safety tool for volunteers to have is good relations with their neighbors, who are likely to be concerned about the health and safety of everyone in the village. Volunteers are safest when they are well integrated in the local society. Peace Corps can help with that integration. The most effective thing that could be done to improve volunteer safety and security would be to have enough in-country Peace Corps staff to visit volunteers to check on their progress, relations with their neighbors, safety, health, etc. Staff needs to have experience as volunteers and experience in their country of service to be effective in such a role. Adding more layers of Peace Corps staff in Washington will not solve health and safety problems. Kevin Quigley should speak to Congress about the reality of life as a Peace Corps volunteer.”

MALE, *Botswana*, 1990–91

“While safety and security of PCVs is an important issue for PC, the risks inherent in working in Third World countries is and has always been a part of the job. I think we Americans try to take all the risk out of our lives at the expense of truly living.”

MALE, *Cameroon*, 1976–78

“I left the Peace Corps because I did not feel safe. Since I left several of my associates have been robbed, assaulted and raped. I do not feel like safety issues were taken seriously enough nor were they budgeted for.”

FEMALE, *West Indies*, 2003

“Safety and security were always the number one concern of Peace Corps staff when I served. Beyond the instructions and guidelines PC staff gave PCVs, there was the responsibility of the PCVs to maintain regular contact with the office, with other volunteers, and with their communities. Increasing safety to PCVs is important, but at the same time, PCVs are adults and should act like them.

FEMALE, *Panama*, 2001–03

- (2) *Should a study be conducted concerning the “Five-Year Rule” of employment for Peace Corps staff and the rule’s potential implications on issues of recruitment, health, safety and productive work assignments?*

YES: 158 (70%)

NO: 60 (27%)

(3) Do you support “Five-Year Rule” exemptions for Peace Corps’ Office of the Inspector General, Office of Safety and Security, and Office of Medical Services?

YES: 114 (51%)

NO: 98 (44%)

Comments on the “Five-Year Rule”:

“The prime role where the 5-year rule might be eliminated is for staff involved in budgets, where experience with the Congressional budgeting process is important.”

RPCV, *Ghana* 1962–64, *Romania* 2004–06

“If the five-year rule is kept it should remain that there should be no exceptions. The entire PC is somewhat transitory; this might hurt in some areas, but all-in-all it is a benefit to keep new people coming in.”

MALE, *Thailand*, 1962–64

“Term limits are, on the whole, a positive part of the PC structure—keeping PC from becoming too bureaucratically rigid. Exceptions should be based on special needs for continuity, experience for opening a new program, program evaluations, etc. at discretion of PC director and RDs—with some cap on the number of third tours (basically, the current system). Legislating certain positions for permanent exemption (S&S, medical, etc.) is NOT a good idea. Machinations that inevitably evolve will result in “creative” definitions of certain person’s jobs in order to circumvent the “5-year” rule. Permanent exemptions will also lead to these folks having undue influence within the system within 5–10 years (*i.e.*, building the bureaucratic empires the 5-year rule is designed to mitigate).”

MALE, *Hungary, Armenia, Mongolia*, 1995–97; 1998–2003

“The five-year rule should be modified. It should apply to how many years someone can serve in a position in Peace Corps, not in the agency. Too much knowledge is lost. If a person who has served 5 years is not hired in another position within the agency, then they should be given the standard 3-year provision towards another federal job. They then could reapply to work for PC at a later time and if hired, so be it.”

FEMALE, *Venezuela*, 1967–69; *Staff*, 1985

“The five-year rule should be done away with except for the newly proposed security personnel. As long as all staff and volunteers are subject to annual review, there is no reason to limit their time of service.”

MALE, *Thailand*, 1975–77

“A process for waiver of the five-year rule should be devised, for successive five-year periods, with required input from active PCVs and RPCVs. The five-year rule made sense for many years and still does. The original reasons—fresh turnover of new ideas with new people and less chance of becoming a big government bureaucracy with the same folks running the show—are still true today. In my mind as a past and current worker in the Office of Medical Services as I look around the office I am thankful for the five-year rule and would additionally say there should be no exceptions and no extensions.”

FEMALE, *Malaysia*, 1967–68

“The 5-year rule should remain for all PC staff. That is the true spirit of the agency.”

FEMALE, *Niger*, 1990–92

“I don’t think security people should be any more sacred than other employees of Peace Corps (regarding the 5-year rule). I do think it important to have medical staff that is knowledgeable and consistent and would support their exemption from the rule.”

FEMALE, *Guatemala*, 1992–94

“I am not ‘solid’ on most of the above questions, and could likely be convinced to change the answer. But, I believe Peace Corps should remain a different kind of agency, without careerists, with minimum bureaucracy, and with the original goals.”

MALE, *Sierra Leone*

(4) *Should an Office of the Ombudsman be created within the Peace Corps?*

YES: 163 (72%)

NO: 58 (26%)

*Comments on the Office of Ombudsman:*

“It will be essential that the Ombudsman and Inspector General who are chosen come from the RPCV community and appreciate the issues, challenges and concerns that country programs face and the nature of the PCV in the field. If these positions are filled by ill-informed folks, the legislation can become detrimental to all concerned.”

MALE, *Sierra Leone, India, Mongolia*, 1966–68; 1969–71; 1995–99

“I like the idea of an Ombudsman; universities and colleges have them, and it seems a better way to bring up problems/issues than solely going to Country Director and/or Washington HQ. I also think the safety/security issues will only become more relevant as time passes and it is a lot of responsibility (on top of so many other duties/responsibilities) for the Country Directors and staff to handle; creating a new position to handle those issues strikes me as a good idea.”

FEMALE, *Dominican Republic*, 2001–02

“Vital to keep Ombudsman and IG autonomous—*i.e.* independent of agency control.”

MALE, *Tonga*, 1997–99

“There needs to be adequate funding for the PC. There also needs to be a way for returnees, or vols, to complain and be heard. So, can't PC set that up with someone as ombudsman without making a whole new position with all the expense of that?”

FEMALE, *Niger*, 1964–66(5) *Should an independent Inspector General for the Peace Corps be established?*

YES: 99 (44%)

NO: 116 (52%)

*Comments on an independent Inspector General:*

“My experience was that at least in Kenya the Country Director's office did an excellent job. Any additional funding by Congress should be used for volunteers not an unnecessary bureaucratic layer of underutilized people.”

MALE, *Kenya*, 1998–2000

“I'm not comfortable with the Inspector General being a presidential appointee, and I am especially uncomfortable with the suggestion that that appointee could remain in office indefinitely (if the five-year rule did not apply).”

FEMALE, *Samoa*, 2000–02

“The staffing of any congressional investigations (or GAO) should be carefully done. A traditional government mindset could lead to totally inappropriate findings.”

MALE, *Philippines*, 1971–76, *Washington Staff*

“I am really nervous about PC becoming a political football ... a more independent Inspector General is one thing, but appointed by the President? That's just asking for it to become a totally political position.”

FEMALE, *Bolivia*, 1998–2000(6) *Do you support a report to Congress by Peace Corps concerning medical screening processes and guidelines, including a statistical review of the medical appeals process?*

YES: 148 (66%)

NO: 70 (31%)

*Comments on medical screening process and guidelines:*

“In general, I am against the plan for Congressional oversight of Peace Corps. I believe Peace Corps needs to plan more for the safety of PCV's and I think that there should be an independent review when a PCV is separated early from the Peace Corps. My personal observation is that when I was in Honduras from 1982–84, any one who should have separated from Peace Corps was and

most of those who had medical problems were adequately treated or sent to the States for treatment. I did have issue with the PC MD in Honduras at the time and more than a few of us questioned his abilities and judgment and we felt that our worries were not given proper consideration.”

FEMALE, *Honduras*, 1982–84

- (7) *Do you support a Comptroller General's review and report on issues pertaining to Peace Corps' volunteer work assignments?*

YES: 117 (52%)

NO: 97 (43%)

*Comments on the issues concerning work assignments:*

“After volunteers have been given job assignments, I believe there should be periodic follow ups to ensure that what they are doing actually benefits the people/students they are sent to help as opposed to fulfilling their own agenda.”

FEMALE, *Kazakhstan*, 1998–2000

“Poor assignment planning was another major problem when I served, and from talking with many other volunteers, this seems to have been an issue throughout the history of Peace Corps. While I fear creating more bureaucracy via new layers of oversight, I also fear that Peace Corps may need some sort of oversight to act in the best interests of volunteers.”

MALE, *Jamaica*, 1991–93

“I think PC staff must evaluate local requests for PCVs. Some won't help more than obstruct. My days in Kofondua, Ghana (01–03). There aren't enough places for us.”

MALE, *Ghana*, 2001–03

- (8) *Which of the following most closely represents your views related to general funding for the Peace Corps and current legislation pertaining to health, safety and security of Peace Corps volunteers? (Choose one)*

**97 (43%)** Peace Corps should continue to move forward with President Bush's call for expanding the number of volunteers in the field. Congress needs to appropriate sufficient funding to address safety and security concerns and pursue Peace Corps expansion targets.

**61 (27%)** Changes proposed in the legislation are not necessary. The use of any additional funding should be determined by the Peace Corps and not congressional legislation.

**34 (15%)** Peace Corps needs to maintain its current number of volunteers. Any funding that goes beyond meeting current volunteer levels should be prioritized for addressing issues included in the Safety/Security legislation.

**31 (14%)** Issues included in congressional legislation are of such importance that they should be given priority attention even if budget constraints require Peace Corps to reduce its number of volunteers in the field.

*Comments on the issues of funding for health, safety, and security of Peace Corps:*

“Safety/Security issues are being run into the ground. Let the volunteers do their work. I'm not sure creating other positions in Washington is exactly what we need ... there are plenty of posts that are operating with insufficient funds. Send the money to where it is most needed ... in the field.”

MALE, *Paraguay*, 1992–2002

“It's not that I think this congressional thing is so very important, but that in general I worry that we spread ourselves way too thin in the interests of keeping up the number of volunteers.”

FEMALE, *Samoa*, 2000–02

“Because of Congress' refusal to fund the Peace Corps program at the requested level, they have reduced the effectiveness of the volunteers currently in the field and seriously put their lives in danger. When a volunteer can't leave the rugged geographical boundaries of his/her site because Congress won't allocate \$40 for a visa to escape, we have some serious problems. I hope nothing serious happens because that seems to be the only catalyst that causes Congress to act”

FEMALE, *Uzbekistan*, 2000–01

“The health and safety of PCVs must remain a high priority regardless of budget considerations.”

MALE, *Sierra Leone*, 1961–62

“I am actually a current PCV directly affected by the massive budget cuts and reapportionment of the remaining budget to cover new safety/security rules. As a result, our post has had to reduce staff, not turn on lights or fans, cut phone availability, cut volunteer conferences and training. DC managed to spend way over budget in anticipation of recruiting based on President Bush’s call for doubling PC, but then the President failed to back an increase in the budget and DC has had to cut post budgets to make up the difference.”

MALE, *Tonga*, 2002–04

“As a current Peace Corps staffer, anything that moves PC away from being a partisan political operation and towards the real mission of PC and real accountability at the highest levels within PC would be worthwhile legislation. Too much money being spent on Mexico, etc., detracts from the real PC mission.”

MALE

- (9) *While not currently in proposed legislation, there has been some suggestion that all Peace Corps volunteers should work in pairs in an effort to increase security. Should it be a requirement that all volunteers be assigned in pairs?*

YES: 24 (11%)

NO: 201 (89%)

*Comments on the issue of volunteers being paired up:*

“Rather than putting volunteers in pairs, I think a “team” approach is more appropriate, in which volunteers are placed in reasonable distances from other volunteers and have guidelines in place for team check-ins and communication.”

FEMALE, *Mali*, 2000–02

“Forcing a pairing of all volunteers will change a dynamic that today’s Peace Corps relies upon. If a volunteer needs PCV help he/she asks for it, if not they do the work themselves with only local support, this is an example and a benefit to the communities we serve.”

MALE, *Thailand*, 1962–64

“The procedures noted will not stop a true terrorist, and they are the only ones we need to be concerned about. PCVs are by their nature very independent, hard working, and likeable people. Give them the tools to accomplish their jobs.”

FEMALE, *Somalia*

“I think working in pairs is good for some and should be an option open to all vols. Some vols may be fine with being by themselves. There has been great success with vols being by themselves. But some may be better with someone. Hope they get along.”

FEMALE, *Niger*, 1964–66

“It is unfair to require volunteers to be assigned in pairs unless the security situation in a country requires it. And if that is the case then the more important question is why are volunteers placed in countries or areas that are so unstable?”

FEMALE, *Kenya*, 1987–89

“Even as a single woman in Colombia, I firmly believe that I would have been less successful in my volunteer assignment, less successful in understanding the communities in which I worked, and undoubtedly would have experienced much less growth as an individual had I been assigned as one of a pair of volunteers.”

FEMALE, *Colombia*, 1973–75

“The stress that life in a different culture can place on a married couple is well known to Peace Corps. Who needs similar stresses with a person with whom one has no commitment, and possibly no affinity? Even co-workers who get along and work well together would be stressed by having their entire lives entwined. Please do not forget that for volunteers in small rural communities, a Peace Corps assignment is not just a job, it is a life. It does not take much

imagination to realize that most volunteers would have their relations with their community significantly altered by the presence of another volunteer of different personality, interests, skills, and demeanor.”

MALE, *Thailand*, 1981–84

“The character of most of the propositions above reflect a naive and inappropriate view of the Peace Corps Volunteer experience. Volunteers are effective precisely because they figure out how to integrate in a foreign culture. Pairing of volunteers would prohibit or delay such integration and create a completely different dynamic.”

MALE, *Senegal*, 1963–65

“I don’t think volunteers should have to be placed in pairs. In my experience that would be unnecessary. Peace Corps staff should use their judgment and specialized knowledge of the host county area to determine if 2 volunteers need to be placed together. This isn’t necessary everywhere and what it means is that some places that could be served won’t be because there aren’t enough volunteers to go around.”

FEMALE, *Macedonia*, 1998–99

(10) *While not currently in proposed legislation, there has been some suggestion that all Peace Corps volunteers should have modern communication equipment, such as cell phones. Should volunteers be required to have such equipment?*

YES: 74 (33%)

NO: 151 (67%)

*Comments on the issue of the use of cell phones:*

“We have to take into consideration that a lot of areas where PCV’s are located do not have accessibility to cell phone networks, but I do believe it is essential for PCV’s to be able to communicate with local offices at all times. We were caught in an attack by UNITA while I was in service. Since I thought that there was a volunteer left behind, the office gave permission to go get them. After I reached the volunteer’s site I found out someone else had already picked him up. I could have seriously been hurt and put myself in a dangerous position for no reason.”

FEMALE, *Namibia*, 1998–2000

“I was an Emergency Zone Coordinator and served on the Safety and Security Work Group for Peace Corps Honduras (2001–03) and as such think that anything Peace Corps and/or Congress through additional funding can do to improve the chain of communication for volunteers in the field would be a great help. We were looking into the idea of cell phones, and other means of communication for some of our more remote volunteers.”

FEMALE, *Honduras*, 2001–03

“Peace Corps volunteers are successful because they live and work in the same circumstances as their counter parts. Changing this in anyway will jeopardize their success/acceptance as well as their ability to become part of the community. So, if their counterparts have cell phones, sure get them for the volunteers. Otherwise, find other tried and true “low tech” ways to ensure safety and security.”

RPCV, *Costa Rica*, 1975–78

“While I was serving as a PCV, my safety in my village was in question. I felt that if I had had a cell phone, I would have been safer. I ended up relocating out of my village.”

FEMALE, *Belize*, 2001–03

“Cell phones might be appropriate in some situations. In my original site, they don’t work. But when I worked in Quito as a PCV coordinator, using a PC-issued cell phone was a lifesaver.”

MALE, *Ecuador*, 1997–2000

“Initially, upon moving to my bush post in Niger, I would have liked a cell phone. Later once I was integrated in the village, it would have been intrusive and extremely unwelcome. Safety is a concern, but so is preserving the culture of the Peace Corps and its ideals.”

FEMALE, *Niger*, 2000–02

"I think that the idea of mandating PCVs to work in pairs or requiring them to carry cell phones will significantly change where volunteers are placed. It may not be a need-based placement in certain regions, provinces or countries. If there is no cell phone service in a village would they then not place a volunteer there even if the village was desperately in need of technical assistance related to agriculture, health or education?"

FEMALE, *Cameroon*, 1993–95

"Depending on the location, cell phones can cause a volunteer to be a target for theft, instead of providing a safety tool."

FEMALE, *Dominican Republic*, 1991–94

"Modern communication equipment in the hands of PCVs would only make them more suspect than they already are. PCVs are always being thought of as spies and such equipment would exacerbate those problems and make the volunteer less safe."

MALE, *Somali Republic*, 1962–64

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you very, very much, Mr. Quigley.  
Ms. Threlkeld.

**STATEMENT OF CYNTHIA THRELKELD, GUATEMALA COUNTRY  
DIRECTOR, PEACE CORPS, WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Ms. THRELKELD. Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I would like to request that my full written testimony be entered into the record.

Senator COLEMAN. Without objection.

Ms. THRELKELD. As the current Country Director in Guatemala and a former volunteer in both Botswana and Costa Rica, I appreciate the opportunity to talk to you today about our program, the role of a country director, and the steps we take to prevent safety and security concerns.

Mr. Chairman, as you noted, I am from Minnesota, and I had the opportunity to go home last May. It was great to be back especially at the height of spring, even though it was 40 degrees.

[Laughter.]

Ms. THRELKELD. Today in Guatemala, we have 185 volunteers working in agriculture, municipal development, the environment, health, small business, and youth. Volunteers work to diversify agricultural production and develop ecotourism projects. They work with local government to increase citizen participation in the democratic process and with schools to improve the health of rural elementary students. With 50 percent of the Guatemala population below the age of 24, our newest program is in youth development, and all of our programs include a component directed to youth.

Let me share with you the role and responsibilities as a country director. Being a country director is an immense responsibility that my colleagues and I take to heart. We are held accountable, and rightfully so, for everything that happens at our post, from financial management to program quality and, first and foremost, for the safety and security of our volunteers.

The primary components of our safety and security plan can be classified in two major categories: prevention and training, and support and response.

Prevention is the most critical part of our plan and a component to which we devote a great deal of time. Peace Corps/Guatemala provides 12 weeks of pre-service training upon arrival in country.

Trainees are given the tools to understand the security risks unique to Guatemala, as well as general personal safety practices. By the end of training, the new volunteers are expected to develop their own personal plan and be prepared to activate and participate fully in assuring their safety and security.

In August of 2003, Peace Corps/Guatemala added the position of safety and security coordinator, which now plays a central role at post. Our coordinator is a former volunteer who served in Guatemala and has lived in the country for over 7 years. He has earned the trust of the volunteers and helps us achieve the essential goal of encouraging them to act upon the safety and security information that we provide to them. He coordinates the information needed for our emergency action plan, ensures our documentation for compliance with Peace Corps regulations, and has developed and presented some of the sessions in our pre-service training.

The role of the Peace Corps program manager is perhaps the most critical to volunteer safety. Our program managers are responsible to develop the project plans, to select the sites and the counterpart agencies, to provide technical assistance, personal support, and to visit volunteers in the field.

In addition to the Peace Corps staff, the program manager and the safety and security coordinator, as the Country Director I also make site visits. I visit a region of the country for several days each month, supplemented with day trips to volunteers who are closer to the capital. It is important to me to see firsthand how volunteers live and work.

A majority of volunteers in Guatemala own their own cell phones, which they purchase through their monthly stipend. The number has increased substantially over the past years as the technology in Guatemala has improved. It has made a substantial difference in our ability to maintain close contact with volunteers. It is now a key component of our emergency action plan. There are still volunteers, however, who depend on telegrams, beepers, a community phone, or a phone or a radio of their counterpart agency because cell phone coverage is not universal. We maintain at least three ways to contact each volunteer at all times.

We tested our emergency action plan on May 26th of this year by sending out a message by cell phone, by beeper, by phone, with a communication to every volunteer to personally contact the Peace Corps office immediately. We had outstanding results with 92 percent of our volunteers responding within 16 hours and confirmed location of 100 percent of our volunteers within 32.

Peace Corps/Guatemala has an excellent relationship with the U.S. embassy. The Ambassador places high priority on collaboration with Peace Corps. I attend weekly country team and emergency action committee meetings and receive briefings from the appropriate embassy staff as needed on political, social, or economic issues that may have an impact on the Peace Corps. Our primary contact is with the regional security office which plays a key role in all of our safety and security plans.

My written testimony provides even more detail on the comprehensive program for the prevention and safety of security incidents. In addition, Peace Corps/Guatemala is prepared to respond with a full range of support to volunteers who are victims of crimes



or accidents. The Peace Corps medical office is the first line of response to volunteers who have been injured in either in an accident or an incident. Our medical staff includes a consulting doctor and qualified nurses who are on 24-hour call in the event of a major incident. Our response is the close coordination from the full team: Peace Corps/Guatemala, the regional security office, Peace Corps/Washington. We provide immediate attention to the physical and emotional needs of the volunteer and take all steps necessary for successful prosecution.

In conclusion, I would like to say that since my two terms as a volunteer in the 1980s and the 1990s, the goals of the Peace Corps have not changed, but believe me, the level of accountability and the extent of regulations related to safety and security have. Responsibility is placed on all parties, from the country director and staff to the volunteers themselves.

I sincerely doubt you would find any volunteers currently serving in Guatemala who would complain that Peace Corps does not provide enough information, support, or training on safety and security. It is more likely they would complain that too many measures are in place and it restricts their personal liberties.

Serving in the Peace Corps requires a willingness to restrict your personal liberties. Volunteers are expected to uphold the image of Peace Corps at all times, to live within the rules and the norms for safety and security, and to be held accountable for their time and actions. You would be impressed by the way volunteers in Guatemala step up to that responsibility and the contributions they make to the United States.

Mr. Chairman, I am grateful to you and to members of the committee for your continued support for the Peace Corps mission. If your travels ever take you to Guatemala, I would be delighted to show you the work of our volunteers.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Threlkeld follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CYNTHIA THRELKELD

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee today. As the current Country Director in Guatemala and a former Peace Corps volunteer in both Botswana and Costa Rica, I appreciate this opportunity to present an overview of our program in Guatemala, my role as the Country Director, and our efforts to prevent and respond to safety and security issues. Mr. Chairman, I would like to add that Minnesota has been my home for over 25 years. I was just in the Twin Cities for a visit at the end of May, and it was great to be back home at the height of spring.

Let me begin my remarks by highlighting Peace Corps' rich history of service in Guatemala and the current status of our program. The first Peace Corps volunteers arrived in Guatemala in 1963. In recognition of 41 years of quality service, in March of this year, President Oscar Berger awarded Peace Corps with the Orden del Quetzal, the highest honor Guatemala bestows on an individual or organization that has rendered distinguished service. Peace Corps Director Gaddi Vasquez personally came to Guatemala to receive the honor on behalf of the more than 4,000 volunteers who have served in Guatemala since 1963, and to issue a challenge to those of us who have the privilege to serve there today. Peace Corps has the respect and credibility that is needed to make a significant impact on grassroots development efforts, which strengthens the friendship and goodwill between our countries at a time when Guatemala is again under new, forward-looking leadership.

Today we have 185 volunteers working in agriculture, municipal development, the environment, health, small business and youth development. Volunteers work to diversify agricultural production and better manage harvests. They work with local

government to increase citizen participation in the democratic process, and with schools to improve the health and hygiene of rural elementary students. Volunteers help develop eco-tourism projects and promote environmental education. With 50 percent of the Guatemalan population under the age of 24, our newest program is in youth development, and all of our programs include a component directed to youth as the basis for the future of the country.

By living and working in local communities, volunteers learn firsthand about the challenges that face a developing country. Poverty is no longer a statistic; it translates into names and faces. Volunteers do not leave this community behind after they have completed their two years of service. They return to the U.S. and become their voice to the world, helping Americans better understand our role as world citizens.

Let me share with you my role and responsibilities as Country Director in Guatemala. Being a Country Director is much more than the challenge of representing the Peace Corps and implementing its goals in grassroots development and intercultural exchange. It is an immense responsibility that my colleagues and I take to heart. We are held accountable, and rightfully so, for everything that happens at our post, from financial management to program quality and, first and foremost, for the safety and security of volunteers.

As the Director has noted, the message that safety and security is the number one priority of the Peace Corps is clearly conveyed to Country Directors as well as to all volunteers throughout their term of service.

The primary components of our safety and security plan can be classified into two main categories: (1) prevention and training and (2) support and response.

#### I. PREVENTION AND TRAINING

Prevention is the most critical part of our safety plan, and a component to which we devote a great deal of time and attention.

##### *Pre-Service Training*

Peace Corps/Guatemala has twelve weeks of Pre-Service Training for prospective volunteers upon arrival in country. In addition to being fully integrated into the language, cross-cultural and technical training, the topic of safety and security is covered in seven separate sessions presented by the State Department's Regional Security Officer, the Peace Corps Medical Officer, and the Safety and Security Coordinator through a combination of lectures, videos, information on crime statistics, and a review of past security incidents.

Trainees are given the tools to understand the security risks unique to Guatemala, as well as general personal safety practices. By the end of training, the new volunteers are expected to develop their own personal plan and participate actively and fully in assuring their own safety and security.

##### *Role of Peace Corps/Guatemala Safety and Security Coordinator*

In August of 2003, Peace Corps/Guatemala added the position of Safety and Security Coordinator, which now plays a central role at post. The Safety and Security Coordinator reports directly to the Country Director and concentrates on safety and security issues related to the prevention, training and support of volunteers. Our coordinator is a former Volunteer who served in Guatemala, and has lived in the country for over seven years. He has earned the trust of volunteers and thus helps us achieve the essential, but somewhat elusive goal of encouraging volunteers to act upon the safety and security information we provide to them. He also coordinates the information needed for our Emergency Action Plan, ensures our documentation for compliance with Manual Section 270 related to safety and security, developed and presented some of the sessions in Pre-Service Training, organizes the Regional Safety and Security meetings, manages the new E-Zone Coordinator system. The Safety and Security Coordinator also keeps fully informed on any political or social disturbances through contact with the State Department's Regional Security Office and by staying informed through local news sources. He is a resource to both volunteers and staff, and I will elaborate on some of the safety tools that he has helped put in place.

##### *Bi-Annual Regional Safety and Security Meetings*

Peace Corps/Guatemala holds safety and security meetings for all volunteers every six months within each region of the country to reinforce safety and security training, review any new security issues, and discuss any concerns volunteers may have about their personal safety. Topics of discussion include preparation plans for natural disasters and review of the Peace Corps Emergency Action Plan.

### *Volunteer Safety Manual*

To augment our safety information, our Safety and Security Coordinator just completed a draft of a Volunteer Safety Manual that will reinforce and expand upon topics covered in Pre-Service Training and includes sections on safety while at site, including housing and work related risks; during travel, including off-limits areas and travel to the capital; and other general concerns specific to Guatemala.

### *Role of Peace Corps Program Manager, Site Selection, and Field Visits*

The role of the Peace Corps Program Manager is perhaps the most critical to volunteer safety. Our Program Managers are responsible to develop project plans and Volunteer Activity Descriptions, select sites and counterpart agencies, provide technical assistance and personal support, and visit volunteers in the field. Peace Corps/Guatemala has specific criteria and a checklist for site selection that includes a security assessment, availability of appropriate housing, access to transportation and communication and other key factors.

Site visits are made a minimum of twice during the first year, including once during the first three months, and once during the second year of service, with additional visits as needed due to either program issues or security concerns. Volunteers select their own housing within a clear set of security guidelines, often with assistance from either their counterpart agency or a volunteer site mate. The Program Manager reviews and approves housing during the initial site visit, and also assesses the neighborhood. In addition to site visits from the Program Manager, volunteers also receive visits from the Program and Training Officer, Program Assistants, and the Safety and Security Coordinator. These visits are on an as-needed basis, and supplement the visits mentioned above.

As Country Director, I also make site visits. I make one extended visit of several days to a specific region of the county each month, supplemented with day trips to volunteers closer to the capital. It is important for me to see how volunteers live and work, and to listen to their comments and concerns about their projects, as well as their general sense of well being. In addition, I have an "open door" policy for volunteers that stop by the office, respond to phone calls and emails that I receive on a continuous basis, meet with volunteers during in-service trainings, and personally interview each Volunteer at the completion of his or her service. Safety and security is a topic during each of these contacts.

### *Expectations for Volunteer Behavior and Peer Support Network*

Peace Corps/Guatemala expects volunteers to adjust their lifestyle to adhere to recommended safety and security standards and policies. Some policies can result in administrative separation if not followed, especially the Peace Corps "zero tolerance" policy on the use of illegal drugs.

Peace Corps staff recognize that the personal and emotional challenges of serving as a Volunteer can at times contribute to adjustment problems or excessive alcohol use, which in turn compromises personal security. Peace Corps/Guatemala volunteers have taken an active role by developing a peer support network as a way to assist one another with these challenges, especially during the initial months of service.

### *Communication, Emergency Action Plan, and Cell Phones*

A majority of volunteers in Guatemala own their own cell phones, which they purchase through their monthly stipend or personal resources. The number has increased substantially over the past several years, as access to the technology in Guatemala has improved. It has made a substantial difference in the ability of Peace Corps to maintain close contact with volunteers and is now a key component of the Emergency Action Plan. There are still volunteers who depend on telegrams, beepers, community phones, or counterpart agencies as their primary connection to the office because cell phone coverage is not yet universal, and the Peace Corps maintains at least three methods of contacting volunteers at all times. Volunteers are aware of the need to maintain discretion in the use of cell phones, especially in order to avoid theft, by keeping the phone on silent ring and not using it while in public view. Additionally, the Peace Corps office in Guatemala City also has a satellite phone for use in case of major emergencies.

Peace Corps/Guatemala tested its Emergency Action Plan on May 26th by sending out text messages by cell phone, beeper, telegrams, email, and phone depending on the communication plan for each Volunteer. As part of the test, volunteers received a message instructing them to personally contact the Peace Corps office immediately. We had excellent results that far exceeded any previous tests, with confirmed location of volunteers according to the following timeline: 83% within 8 hours; 92% within 16 hours; and 100% within 32 hours.

*Out of Site Policy and Emergency Zone System (E-Zone)*

An improved out of site policy for Peace Corps Guatemala went into effect July 5, 2003. The policy provides specific instructions to volunteers on how to report their location to Peace Corps every time they travel out of their site. Concurrent with the new policy, a modified warden system called the "E-Zone System" was put in place. This system creates a nationwide network of volunteers with good access to communication that have agreed to assist with relaying security information to volunteers within their region and to serve as a standard point of contact for updates during an emergency. Their role supplements rather than replaces staff responsibilities for these tasks. E-Zone Coordinators receive training and a small stipend for cell phone minutes and Internet use.

*Restrictions on Travel to Capital and Dedicated Security Phone Line*

Guatemala City is one of the more high-risk areas of the country. Volunteers are advised to avoid travel to the capital except when necessary for official business. Peace Corps/Guatemala has a dedicated security phone line with a message that is updated daily advising volunteers on any protests, roadblocks, or disturbances in the capital and whether it is clear to travel to the Peace Corps office. Volunteers are instructed to call the number before any travel to the capital, and to take a taxi from the edge of town to the Peace Corps office rather than using public transportation. Also, U.S. embassy families open their home to volunteers through a "bed and breakfast" program to offer a safe alternative to a hotel, as well as moral support for volunteers while they are in the capital.

*Embassy Support and Role of Regional Security Office*

Peace Corps/Guatemala has an excellent relationship with the U.S. Embassy. The Ambassador places a high priority on collaboration with Peace Corps, and communicates that to the Country Team. The Ambassador briefs Peace Corps trainees on the political situation in Guatemala, hosts our swearing-in ceremonies, makes site visits to volunteers when he is in the field, personally calls volunteers who have been injured during service, and participates in the "bed and breakfast" program that I just mentioned. As Country Director, I attend weekly Country Team and Emergency Action Committee meetings, and I receive briefings from the appropriate embassy staff as needed on political, social, or economic issues that may have an impact on the Peace Corps.

The primary safety and security contact for the Peace Corps within the embassy is with the Regional Security Office. The Regional Security Office plays an integral role in all aspects of our safety and security plan: they present Pre-Service Training sessions on crime prevention; provide information on security concerns in specific geographic regions or during civil disturbances; participate in debriefings or meetings to discuss specific incidents; and respond immediately to major security incidents involving volunteers, including traveling to site to assist local police with crime investigations and follow-up.

Maintaining a strong relationship between Peace Corps/Guatemala and the Regional Security Office is considered one of our highest priorities.

## II. RESPONSE AND SUPPORT

We have a comprehensive program for the prevention of safety and security incidents, but we can never fully eliminate them because of the realities of the environment in which we operate. Peace Corps/Guatemala is prepared to respond with a full range of support to volunteers who are victims of crime or accidents.

*Role of the Peace Corps Medical Office*

The Peace Corps Medical Office is the first line of response to volunteers who have been injured in either an accident or assault. Our medical staff includes a consulting medical doctor and qualified nurses who are on call 24 hours a day. These medical professionals are highly experienced in responding to both the physical and emotional needs of volunteers, collecting the proper forensic evidence when necessary, and serving as a triage for further medical or counseling services either in Guatemala, or through medical evacuation to the United States. The Medical Office works in close collaboration with the Office of Medical Services in Peace Corps/Washington, which provides excellent care to volunteers who need to go to Washington for post-trauma counseling or medical follow-up after a safety or security incident occurs.

The Medical Officers are also fully involved in pre-service training, in-service training, and provide input on criteria for housing, site selection and all other aspects of Peace Corps life.

*Assaults and Major Security Incidents*

In the event of a major security incident or assault, the key to the response is the close coordination and collaboration from the full team, including Peace Corps/Guatemala, the Regional Security Office, and Peace Corps/Washington. One excellent resource developed by Peace Corps is the "Rape Response Handbook," which clearly outlines roles and responsibilities. This handbook covers not only the immediate steps that need to be taken to ensure the physical and emotional well-being of the Volunteer, but also steps for successful prosecution of the case, and tips for managing the difficult emotional response of the victim, as well as other volunteers and staff.

*Debriefing and Monitoring of Security Incidents*

Peace Corps/Guatemala carefully reviews security incidents, both with volunteers and staff, including the Regional Security Office when appropriate. The goal is to cover the following points: could the incident have been prevented; what was the quality and depth of the Peace Corps/Guatemala staff response; were there any steps the Volunteer could have taken to reduce the risk; what are the lessons learned for site development or Volunteer training; and what are the recommendations for monitoring or further action steps. Volunteers are directly involved in the development of any action plans, especially those involving possible site changes or the need for close monitoring of the security situation in their community or region.

*Peace Corps Office of Inspector General*

The Peace Corps Office of Inspector General coordinates the investigation and prosecution of violent crimes against volunteers, including providing guidance on the management of forensic evidence. Each case has to be managed according to the laws and court procedures in Guatemala, and the Country Director consults with the Office of Inspector General and the Regional Security Officer about the retention of a local lawyer to advise the post on the criminal procedures. An agent from the Inspector General's Office will interview crime victims to help clarify the facts of the case, and will accompany those victims willing to return to Guatemala for court proceedings.

*Conclusion*

I served two terms as a Peace Corps Volunteer, in the 1980s and again in the mid-1990s. The goals of the Peace Corps have not changed, but—believe me—the level of accountability and the extent of the regulations related to safety and security certainly have. Responsibility is placed on all parties from the Country Director and staff to the volunteers themselves.

I doubt you would find many volunteers who currently serve in any of the 71 Peace Corps programs around the world who would complain that the Peace Corps does not provide enough information, training or support on safety and security. It is more likely they would complain that too many measures are in place, and it restricts their personal liberties.

Service in the Peace Corps requires a willingness to sacrifice some of your personal liberties. Volunteers are expected to represent the image of the Peace Corps at all times, live within the rules and norms for safety and security, and be held accountable for their time and their actions. You would be impressed by the way volunteers in Guatemala step up to that responsibility, and the contributions they make representing the United States.

In return for their commitment, the Volunteer has the right to expect the Peace Corps to provide a well-defined job, a carefully selected site and the proper technical, medical and personal support to help facilitate their success. The primary role of the Country Director is to ensure that all parties live up to their end of the bargain.

Does it always work the way we hope it will, and thus is everyone content and satisfied? No, we're not perfect, but we do our best and we set high standards and continually strive to improve.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I am grateful to you and members of the Committee for your continued support of the Peace Corps mission. If your travels ever bring you to Guatemala, I would be delighted to show you the work of our volunteers—wonderful American citizens who truly exemplify a spirit of service. I now look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you, Ms. Threlkeld.  
Ms. Maloy.

**STATEMENT OF GLADYS MALOY, FORMER PEACE CORPS  
ROMANIA VOLUNTEER, WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Ms. MALOY. Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I submitted a lengthy testimony for the record. If you would enter that, I would appreciate it.

Senator COLEMAN. It will be entered, without objection.

Ms. MALOY. Thank you. Let me begin by thanking you for being able to appear here. My name is Gladys Maloy, and I am a former Peace Corps volunteer in the country of Romania from February 2000 to June 2002. So my comments and observations are quite recent and fresh in my memory.

Today I would like to talk about the safety and security I experienced during my Peace Corps experience, and I have made an effort to let you draw your own conclusions, although at the end I do try to lead you a little.

Romania is a country of approximately 23 million people with a communist past that was both destructive to the people, as well as the environment. Peace Corps came soon after the 1989 revolution, and I was a member of the 10th group of volunteers in country. Our group was diverse with all ages and backgrounds. Our official jobs included social work, teaching English, business development, and environment. However, we all taught our colleagues English and were involved in many projects from hugging babies in orphanages to encouraging voter participation in elections and policy making.

The first 12 weeks were devoted to preparing us to live and work in the country. During that time, I lived with a Romanian family and met every day with other volunteers for training. My Romanian host did not speak English, so it was a challenge and sometimes frustrating, but always stimulating.

Near the end of training, our group set up our own safety and security committee of volunteers, and we elected representatives from the major geographic areas of Romania. These representatives worked closely with Peace Corps staff and were available to discuss personal and emotional issues from volunteers who were hesitant to discuss those with staff.

Near the end of training, I was introduced to my NGO counterpart and traveled with her for a few days to site. My counterpart was a member of the organization I would work with and was responsible for my welfare at work and at home.

Soon after I moved to site, Peace Corps medical staff visited me and reviewed my living conditions. If I had had a problem, they would have come sooner. Site visits by Peace Corps program staff and the country director were frequent.

I lived in Galati, a city of 400,000 at the mouth of the Danube River and worked in the environmental sector. Other Peace Corps volunteers, all women, lived there and worked in different sectors, but we all had separate apartments. Peace Corps did not provide cell phones, but I purchased one, as did most other volunteers, and we had good reception. The cost of the cell phone was well within our monthly living allowance of \$188 a month.

Any time I left site for another location in Romania, even weekends and holidays, I had to report my destination to my program director, along with all contact information, reason for travel and

dates. When leaving the country, I needed prior approval and a request for vacation days, and it had to be filled out in advance and approved by my program director and the country director.

The country director did weekly mailings to all volunteers with a *Newsweek* magazine and a letter containing country news and advisories of potential security risks where volunteers lived and in Bucharest, the capital city. A Peace Corps medical volunteer and a program staff member were always available for consultation by telephone, 24 hours a day.

An emergency action plan was in place, and it used a tier system of volunteer contact. The system was tested often when new groups arrived and at unannounced times. I do not remember the statistics, but I do recall that if it was not fast enough, they did it again.

Judging from my experience in Peace Corps as a volunteer, the safety and security of volunteers is a high priority, and with the changing world situation, they have adapted quickly to meet these demands. One example in Romania is with the formation of a volunteer advisory committee of elected representatives from each sector to screen volunteer issues and present them to the country director at a monthly meeting. I was elected to represent the environmental sector and after a shaky start, the participation was remarkable. We were able to give the country director an insight into volunteer concerns and problems that he would have never been able to or had the time to address.

Keeping the focus on volunteers and not letting one issue overshadow all others is important. My experience in Romania was one of the most rewarding of my life. I feel the Peace Corps did everything possible to secure my safety, but as always, anywhere you travel, you take personal responsibility for being aware of dangers and making an effort to avoid them. Being integrated into the community is of utmost importance, and it allows us, as Peace Corps volunteers and citizens of the United States, to promote all the great values for which this country stands.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear, and I hope my brief presentation of my Peace Corps experience is helpful for your investigation and your decision-making.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Maloy follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF GLADYS M. MALOY

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, let me begin by thanking you for the opportunity of appearing before you today. My name is Gladys Maloy; I was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Romania from February 2000 until June 2002, so my comments and observations are quite recent and fresh in my memory.

I was born and raised in south Florida and was Mayor of my small town in Palm Beach County for twelve years. I earned a degree in Chemistry and studied accounting and finance. I have three grown children, two attorneys and a Ph.D. Peace Corps had always been something I thought about doing; so, when the company at which I was CFO was sold, I joined as a senior volunteer. Today I want to talk about the safety and security as I experienced it during my Peace Corps service.

Romania is a country of approximately 23 million people with a communist past that was both destructive to the people as well as the environment. Peace Corps came soon after the December 1989 revolution and I was a member of the 10th group of volunteers in country. Our group was diverse with all ages and backgrounds. Our official jobs included social work, teaching English, business development and environment; however we all taught our colleagues English and were involved in many other projects from hugging babies in the orphanages to encouraging voter participation in elections and policy making.

### *Training*

The first 12 weeks in Romania were devoted to preparing us to live and work in country. During that time I lived with a Romanian family and met each day (Monday through Saturday) with the other volunteers for eight hours of training in Romanian language, cross-cultural orientation, technical training, and safety and security. My Romanian hosts did not speak English so it was challenging and sometimes frustrating, but always stimulating. This living arrangement was helpful in understanding the country and gave me an in depth look into the life of the ordinary Romanian.

Each training session consisted of four hours of language with the Peace Corps Romanian language teachers. The remaining four hours were training sessions with Peace Corps medical and program staff, national government officials, local security officials, NGO leaders, U.S. officials and others. There were lectures on safety and security issues which included videos, publications on crimes statistics with detailed problems and their solutions. Volunteers already in country came to training sessions, shared their experiences and gave us information on what to expect.

During Saturday sessions we took trips with our language teachers to acquaint us with travel by train, bus and taxi. Since our teachers were Romanian, we received invaluable first-hand knowledge of what to do, where to go and where not to go. We also took a three-day trip with our language teacher to visit volunteers already working with an organization. We meet their counterpart and visited their office and apartment.

Near the end of training our group set up a Safety and Security Committee of volunteers and elected representatives from the major geographic areas of Romania. These representatives worked closely with the Peace Corps medical staff and were available to discuss personal and emotional issues the volunteers were hesitant to discuss with staff. We were fortunate to have three trained physiotherapists in Group 10 who were all members of this committee.

### *Moving to Site*

Near the end of training I was introduced to my NGO counterpart and traveled with her for a few days to site. My counterpart was a member of the organization I would work with and was responsible for my welfare at work and at home. My counterpart found an apartment and after consulting with Peace Corps medical, she rented it for me. I was given a checklist by Peace Corps medical office to evaluate the apartment for their review. There were detailed evaluation criteria concerning health and safety, such as no apartment could be located on the ground floor unless it had bars on the windows and doors. Peace Corps medical and program staff carefully evaluated the assessments and if there was a problem they went to the site to review it.

Soon after I moved to site the Peace Corps medical staff visited me and reviewed my living conditions. If I had had a problem they would have come sooner. I was asked to supply a list with addresses and phone numbers of my close neighbors and the pharmacies, doctors and hospitals in my area so that they would be on record with Peace Corps in case of an emergency. My counterpart information was already on file but I verified it. Medical also visited me at my one year anniversary.

### *Living at Site*

I lived in Galati, a city of 400,000 at the mouth of the Danube River as it flows into the Danube Delta and the Black Sea, and worked in the environmental sector. Other Peace Corps volunteers lived there and worked in different sectors, but we all had separate apartments. Galati has a high Roma population and the major employer is the Sedix steel mill, one of the largest steel mills in Europe. Unemployment is high due to cut backs in steel production for the world market. My counterpart was helpful in introducing me to the city and making sure I was comfortable with my new surroundings.

Peace Corps did not provide cell phones, but I purchased one, as did most other volunteers, and had good reception. The cost of the cell phone was well within my monthly living allowance of \$188 per month. Some of the volunteers in small villages and mountainous regions were unable to use cell phones and relied on internet cafes, which were abundant in most communities, and land line phones either at home or in their office or school. When I returned to Romania for a visit in November 2003, I found that cell phone service was available country wide and that the volunteer living allowance covered the cost.

Site visits by Peace Corps program staff and the country director were frequent. The environmental sector was very active in many projects and the program staff acted as a conduit for passing information. Any time I left my site for another location in Romania (even weekends and holidays) I had to report my destination to my



program director along with all contact information, reason for the travel and dates. When leaving the country I needed prior approval and a request for vacation days had to be filed in advance and approved by my program director and the country director.

The country director did weekly mailings to all volunteers with a Newsweek magazine and letter. The letter, along with other things, contained advisories of potential security risks where volunteers lived and in Bucharest, the capitol city. We also received e-mails to keep us informed before the weekly mailing arrived. A Peace Corps medical and program staff were always available by phone 24 hours.

An Emergency Action Plan was in place and it used a tier system of volunteer contact. Peace Corps contacted the top tiers and they were responsible for contacting the next tier and reporting to Peace Corps and so on. The system was tested often when new groups arrived and at unannounced times. I do not recall the statistics but I do recall that if it was not fast enough it was done again.

#### *Summary*

Judging from my experience as a Peace Corps volunteer the safety and security of the volunteers is a high priority and with the changing world situation they have adapted quickly to meet those demands. One example is in Romania with the formation of a Volunteer Advisory Committee of elected representatives from each sector to screen volunteer issues and present them to the country director at a monthly meeting. I was elected to represent the environment sector and after a shaky start the participation was remarkable. We were able to give our country director an insight into volunteer concerns and problems that he would never have been able to or have the time to address.

Keeping the focus on the volunteers and not letting one issue over shadow all the others is an important function of the Peace Corps. Creating more structured and operational peer support groups, while volunteers are in country as well as addressing effectiveness of safety and security, site selection and counterpart choices would allow for a more robust safety net for volunteers.

My experience in Romania was one of the most rewarding of my life. I feel the Peace Corps did everything possible to insure my safety, but as always anywhere you travel you must take personal responsibility for being aware of the dangers and making every effort to avoid them. I certainly agree and appreciate the Peace Corps safety and security policies of placing volunteers in their community thus enabling them to work closely on a more personal level. Being integrated into the community is of the utmost importance for it allows us as United States citizens to promote all the great values for which our country stands.

I thank you for the opportunity to appear and I hope my brief presentation of my Peace Corps experience has been in some way helpful to your investigation.

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you, Ms. Maloy.

Just a general comment to the volunteers. Thank you for your service. I have the deepest respect and admiration for what you do. I reflect on Mr. Quigley and the association you represent. These are changing times. We live at a time where the values that this country represents are under attack. We are involved in a global war on terror. And the fact that we have folks, young and not so young, who are willing to go out in the world and present the best face of America, truly a helping hand, is something that we should applaud and support and make sure that it is done in the safest way possible, which is really the focus of this hearing. But again, I do want to simply say thank you for your service and what your service reflects. My thanks to all the others who are not in this hearing room today. Very important.

Mr. Quigley, just a quick question. You were going through your list of your survey. We did not get the results of the 5-year rule. What do your members think about the 5-year rule? I want to talk about that.

Mr. QUIGLEY. On the proposal to do a report to Congress on the 5-year rule and the rule's potential implications on issues of recruitment, health, safety, and productive work assignments, Mr. Chairman, 70 percent of our respondents supported this provision.

Senator COLEMAN. Mr. Ford, in your testimony you noted that incident rates for most types of assaults have increased, but the report then says they have stabilized over the last few years. Is there anything that you heard from Director Vasquez's testimony that is inconsistent with what you found in terms of reporting number of incidents?

Mr. FORD. No. First of all, they report the incidents I think in 10 different categories. Some of them have gone down. Some of them have remained about the same as they have been for the last several years. I do not recall, looking at the 2002 data, whether any of them had actually increased over the last few years.

In our report, we show a 10-year trend of incident rates for several of the key categories. When they started to track this information in 1990, in most cases the incident rates went upward, and then they stabilized in many areas over the last 2 or 3 years.

Senator COLEMAN. You noted that since you have issued your report, the Peace Corps has taken a number of steps. Can you give me an overall characterization as to the adequacy of those steps to address some of the concerns that the GAO report raised?

Mr. FORD. Sure, I would be happy to. I have to say that since the report has come out, the Peace Corps has implemented many of the suggestions that were contained in that report. They have added quite a few new staff that have a security mission. They have streamlined and improved their guidelines to the field in terms of trying to come up with a more standardized approach, which when we did our work a couple of years ago, we found was not very standardized.

We have not been back to the field, so we do not know the level of compliance with the new rules. Obviously, we have heard from the witnesses that they believe that there is an active effort on the way to comply with some of the issues that we raised in our report. So overall, we think that the Peace Corps has taken a lot of positive steps to increase this safety and security issue within the organization.

Senator COLEMAN. That is very encouraging, Director Ford.

Ms. Threlkeld talked about testing the system and noted that within 32 hours, 100 percent of the volunteers had been accounted for. Mr. Ford, is that good or bad? Can we do better? Is there any way to evaluate that standard? And have you looked at ways in which we can improve it?

It was indicated that within 32 hours we could find out where all the volunteers are. I am trying to figure out if it should be 24 hours. Is 32 hours the best we can do? Is there a way to improve that? Do you have any sense of that in terms of the tracking down of volunteers?

Mr. FORD. You are asking me this?

Senator COLEMAN. Yes. Is there anything in the GAO study that reflected on the ability to identify volunteers where they are at a given moment?

Mr. FORD. One of the things we did, after we issued our report, was we went back and studied the response times based on the testing that the Peace Corps took in 2003. We did see an increase in the Peace Corps' ability to contact their volunteers. My recollection is that in 2003 40 percent of their overseas missions were able

to get a hold of all of their volunteers within 24 hours, and I think another 20 to 25 percent, they were able to get in contact with all their volunteers within 48 hours. That was an improvement in comparison to 2001 when we did the same analysis. For that same time frame, the scores were much lower. So that is an indication that the Peace Corps is being able to communicate more effectively with their volunteers.

Senator COLEMAN. Ms. Threlkeld, you talked about a program manager. Where do they operate out of?

Ms. THRELKELD. The program managers are based in our office in Guatemala City, but they spend literally over 60 percent of their time in the field. They are in the office on Mondays and Fridays to be able to attend meetings, to be able to do their follow-up and their planning. They are in the field as volunteers over 60 percent of the time.

Senator COLEMAN. Does every country have a program manager? Do you know if throughout the Peace Corps that is a standard? We have country directors, but every one has a program manager?

Ms. THRELKELD. Yes.

Senator COLEMAN. Did any of your folks ever express concerns that they wanted more visits or more interaction, they were feeling isolated out there?

Ms. THRELKELD. If a volunteer requests an additional visit, they will receive an additional visit. The minimum is two visits in the first year by their program manager, one in the second year, but that is the minimum. If they are expressing a concern either about their counterpart agency, about their personal adjustment, either the program manager will go personally, a program assistant, the safety and security officer. I make visits. They will receive attention if they are asking for assistance.

Senator COLEMAN. Senator Dodd raised the issue of individual postings versus clustering folks together. Particularly I raised the issue with the reports of assaults on single females. I would be interested to know the opinion of the volunteers, particularly in rural areas or isolated areas, whether it is good to have more than one person in an area.

What is their reaction to the idea of grouping or clustering volunteers for safety reasons? Mr. Quigley?

Mr. QUIGLEY. Mr. Chairman, as I mentioned briefly, in our survey 90 percent of the respondents strongly opposed the notion of mandatory pairings or tandem posting of volunteers. We did not really ask the question in terms of would they differentiate by gender and by site, whether or not it is rural, remote rural, or urban.

There is a sense, though, that protection for volunteers is related to integration in the community, and that is even more true in the most isolated settings, and a related sense that pairing of volunteers has a consequence of less integration into the community. So I think you would have to look at what the specific circumstances are by country, and our membership has a strong sentiment that those decisions are best made on a country basis because there is so much variation by sector, by parts of the country, by regions of the world.

Senator COLEMAN. Ms. Threlkeld?

Ms. THRELKELD. I would concur with that analysis. Actually having another volunteer assigned at your site may be great for moral support. I do not know that it really increases the safety and security. But if a female volunteer expresses a desire to have someone assigned with them, that is taken into consideration in their site assignment.

Senator COLEMAN. Ms. Maloy.

Ms. MALOY. Although I had other people at my site, I rarely saw them. I think if I had been housed with them, I would have seen them too much and not integrated into the town. I really feel that getting out on your own is such a benefit to the country you are in and to you in order to learn what is going on and help people.

Senator COLEMAN. The testimony is really helpful. I think there is a tendency to think that there is greater security in numbers. Clearly the message here is that the best security is integration into the community, that the community provides security if you are truly part of it, and that is the most effective security that is available. Is that a fair statement?

Ms. MALOY. I agree.

Senator COLEMAN. Ms. Threlkeld?

Ms. THRELKELD. Yes.

Senator COLEMAN. Mr. Quigley?

Mr. QUIGLEY. Yes.

Senator COLEMAN. Senator Voinovich.

Senator VOINOVICH. All of you were here to hear Mr. Vasquez's testimony. Did any of you have any differences of opinion? As you listened to the testimony, was there something that stuck out in your mind and said, gee, I would like to comment on that?

[No response.]

Senator COLEMAN. I take for the record the answer was no. Thank you.

Senator VOINOVICH. That report back in 2002, uneven staff supervision and oversight, staff turnover, unclear guidance in efforts to assure quality of services. You highlighted that testimony before the House International Relations Committee in March. Is that correct?

Mr. FORD. That is correct.

Senator VOINOVICH. Would you say that that statement is true today?

Mr. FORD. As I mentioned earlier, we have not been back out to the field to find out whether or not the new procedures have been fully complied with. We have done an assessment of the Peace Corps Inspector General reports for 2002 and 2003. We find that the Inspector General for the Peace Corps is, in fact, finding some problems in the field, similar in nature to the ones that we found in 2002. However, I do not know what the order of magnitude of those problems are, but we do know that issues like good assignments, adequate housing, ability to maintain good records on volunteers, those issues in fact have come up in the IG reports.

Senator VOINOVICH. One of the things that I asked Mr. Vasquez was the issue of the personnel file. Are those pretty reflective of things or are they kind of fuzzy?

Mr. FORD. I am sorry.

Senator VOINOVICH. The point is, a personnel file on an individual is a kind of a history of that individual—have you ever seen one of those reports?

Mr. FORD. No, I have not.

Senator VOINOVICH. So you do not know what is contained in those reports.

Mr. FORD. Not personnel files, no.

Senator VOINOVICH. In other words, the number of instances where they may have complained or have had a problem.

Mr. FORD. I am not aware of any system that the Peace Corps has that tracks individual complaints, routine complaints or whatever, other than official complaints based on an incident that may have occurred.

Senator VOINOVICH. So that when you do another study, you are going to go out and just interview people.

Mr. FORD. We will also look at the procedures that the Peace Corps has in place to determine whether or not those procedures are being complied with. When we did our work in 2002, that is exactly what we did. We went out and looked at the procedures that the Peace Corps had in place and tried to determine whether or not they were being followed in the field. We found that the performance was mixed.

Senator VOINOVICH. Ms. Maloy, I thank you for being here. It seems to me you had a benchmark experience.

Ms. MALOY. No. It was very typical.

Senator VOINOVICH. If I heard you testify and did not hear anything else, I would say, boy, things are really in great shape today.

Ms. MALOY. Well, I feel that way. But there are little difficulties and the country director is the one that makes everything work. Fortunately, we had a wonderful country director who was very available and made sure that he followed up on everything that happened in the country.

Senator VOINOVICH. I think what Mr. Vasquez said, I thought that was pretty good, that he interviewed each director and then held them responsible. That is a kind of a direct reporting and says it is your baby and I expect you to take care of it, which from a management point of view, sounds to be a good way of getting the job done.

Ms. Threlkeld, the way you have laid things out, that looks pretty good there too.

I guess probably the next time you look at it, it would be interesting to see how it varies. Is it responsive to maybe more difficult parts of the world where things are falling down?

You were where in Romania?

Ms. MALOY. I was on the Black Sea at the mouth of the Danube, right on the border with the Ukraine and Moldova. I was as east as you could get.

Senator VOINOVICH. Was it an outlying area?

Ms. MALOY. It was a city of 400,000 with a huge steel mill, gross unemployment. It was not a seaside resort, for sure.

Senator COLEMAN. It sounds like Cleveland in the 1970s actually.

[Laughter.]

Senator VOINOVICH. St. Paul before you became mayor.

[Laughter.]

Senator VOINOVICH. Thank you.

Senator COLEMAN. Senator Dodd.

Senator DODD. Well, briefly. I apologize having stepped out of the room, but I thank all of you. It is particularly good to see Mr. Quigley, Ms. Maloy, former volunteers, and return Peace Corps volunteers. Thank you very much for your comments and your suggestions today.

Mr. Ford, just very briefly, it has been suggested by Senator DeWine and Senator Durbin that we make the Inspector General position a presidential appointment, Senate-confirmable position. Do you agree with that?

Mr. FORD. GAO's general view on creating independent Inspector Generals is that we favor that. We have not specifically made any recommendations with regard to the Peace Corps Inspector General, but we do believe that the IG should be independent and should be able to report independently on the information that they obtain in the course of doing their work.

Senator DODD. Did you discover, just in your assessment, that the Peace Corps was sort of aware of a lot of the issues that you were discovering?

Mr. FORD. I think that generally the Peace Corps was aware of many of the problems that we identified, yes.

Senator DODD. And have you had a chance to follow up since that report to do any checking?

Mr. FORD. As I mentioned earlier, the Peace Corps—and you heard from the Director this morning—has implemented a number of changes since we issued our report. Many of them are consistent with some of the problems that we identified in our report, so we feel that the Peace Corps is definitely taking action, and in our view it is in the correct direction in terms of safety and security.

Senator DODD. Ms. Maloy, let me just ask you. When I raised the issue of women in rural areas and more remote areas of pairing—not necessarily with another woman. It could be a male volunteer. But I was not suggesting it for all volunteers. I just thought in certain circumstances, particularly when I look at those numbers where the assaults were occurring. What is your assessment of that suggestion? Either one of you. I do not care.

Ms. THRELKELD. Female volunteers, if they feel uncomfortable being assigned to a site alone, have the option to express that to their program manager as their site selection is being made.

Basically we do not believe that having another volunteer in their site in Guatemala necessarily increases their safety and security.

Senator DODD. In rural areas, that is the conclusion?

Ms. THRELKELD. You were talking earlier about what if you needed to call for help. This is a very low tech way to describe it, but you have to be within shouting distance of neighbors in order to have your house be approved by Peace Corps. So even if you are in a rural area, you need to be close to other people in a community, somebody that can respond if you are in trouble.

Senator DODD. Ms. Maloy?

Ms. MALOY. I think the problem is greater in the larger cities where there are more people and there is a lot more crime. The rural areas, at least in Romania, were quite safe. In the larger cit-

ies, you had a lot more crime but more non-violent crime. To have the Peace Corps and your counterpart available 24 hours a day was sufficient for safety of the volunteers. That was better because then volunteers did not cluster together and ignore the people in the country.

Senator DODD. Listen, I was telling the Chairman earlier when the first panel was leaving, having served alone as a Peace Corps volunteer, I much preferred that service in many ways, and I think it was better in some ways. The tendency to sort of cluster together, particularly during the early months of that service, in terms of language ability and acculturation and so forth, makes it much more difficult because the gravitation to someone you can talk with is strong. And invariably someone gets along better or someone is more personable or whatever and you get competitions that can occur within the community that can be difficult.

That is why I was curious to ask the Director whether or not there is any pattern that showed up, along with these other statistics, that might warrant giving more consideration to that as an option for people under certain circumstances.

I must say I got kick out of the GAO report because you talked about I guess it was the Dayton article. The article was talking about people not being well prepared and backgrounds. I was an English literature major and they trained me to work with pigs.

[Laughter.]

Senator DODD. As I say, it is a presumptuous notion to take a 22-year-old, as many of us were—and obviously those numbers change. But that is not the concern I would have, the fact that people are not specifically trained to grapple throughout their life experiences, particularly at that age, is not any great burden in my view. I found it rather naive for them to make a suggestion. When you go back and look at the backgrounds of people and what they ended up doing in the Peace Corps, what they end up doing could be substantially different. So I just found that sort of amusing as one of the critiques of the volunteers' work.

Well, I think we would all appreciate here—and the clock is running out—any continuing ideas. I would be interested specifically in any additional suggestions you might make to the legislation being suggested by Senators DeWine and Durbin. You have given us, Mr. Quigley, I think some very valuable information in terms of how former volunteers look at these issues. I think it is very, very interesting, some of the survey numbers here. But I would be very interested in any other suggestions that volunteers might bring to a piece of legislation. We rarely get an opportunity to look at this. The 5-year rule, again I would be very interested. I do not know if that came up while I was out of the room or not in terms of how you feel about that. It would be very interesting as well to hear your comments.

I apologize we do not have more time, but I thank you all very, very much.

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you, Senator Dodd. Thank you, Senator Voinovich. Again, to the witnesses, I want to thank you for your service to America and for appearing before this committee this morning.

Without objection, the record of today's hearing will remain open for 10 days to receive additional questions for the record.

This hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:32 a.m., the committee was adjourned.]

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