

# MS 461 Crimes Against Volunteers and Trainees Procedures

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**Effective Date:** April 17, 2024

**Responsible Office:** Office of Safety and Security

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## Attachments

Attachment A – Security Incident Management System (SIMS) Procedures

Attachment B – Emergency Notification Flow Chart for Country Directors

Attachment C – CARS Call Planning Tool

For more information on the electronic Serious or Imminent Threat Assessment (SITA) and Post Incident Assessment (PIA) tools and other helpful guides, visit the [SIMS Resource Center](#).

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## 1.0 Applicability and Definitions

### 1.1 Applicability

Being a victim of a Crime can be a traumatic event that can have physical and psychological impacts. These Incidents affect individuals differently; hence the Peace Corps' response is uniquely tailored to fit the needs of the individual Volunteer and the circumstances surrounding the Incident. When a Volunteer reports an Incident, Peace Corps staff are responsible in providing an effective, timely, compassionate response and to make every effort to identify opportunities that allow a Volunteer to safely complete their service.

Effective response requires that we provide for the Volunteer's safety, security, medical, advocacy, and emotional needs. In order to do this, staff must be well-informed of the local laws and investigative practices and be willing to advocate within the local systems on behalf of the Volunteer. Reports of sexual assault must be handled in accordance with MS 243 *Responding to Sexual Assault*. All information about Volunteer Incidents must be treated with discretion and shared only with those staff who have a specific need to know. All Peace Corps staff who are involved in responding to Incidents must comply with the agency's confidentiality policies.

### 1.2 Definitions

The terms defined in MS 461 *Crimes Against Volunteers and Trainees* have the same meanings when used in these procedures.

## 2.0 Minimum Standards in Response for Every Reported Incident

- (a) While every Crime is unique and requires a tailored response, there are specific actions that Post should take in all cases. These actions include but may not be limited to:

- (1) Unless the Volunteer verbally reports the Incident, staff must establish positive voice contact with the Volunteer as soon as possible except where specified.
- (2) Any staff member that is made aware of an Incident must report the Incident to the Safety and Security Manager (SSM) immediately. If the Volunteer appears to be physically or emotionally distressed due to the Incident, then the Incident must also be reported to the PCMO immediately.
- (3) In accordance with the Security Incident Reporting Guide (SIRG), Designated Staff must document the Incident in the Security Incident Management System (SIMS) within three (3) business days.
- (4) Designated Staff must inform the Volunteer of the option to report to local law enforcement.
- (5) If the Volunteer has elected to report to local law enforcement, the SSM or an appropriate staff member should make every effort to assist and accompany the Volunteer in filing the police report. A Volunteer should never be directed by staff to file a police report by themselves.
- (6) To the extent possible, staff should assist the Volunteer in managing the Volunteer's administrative needs associated with the Incident (e.g., letting Volunteer use PC phone to cancel credit cards, facilitate connections with embassy personnel for passport).
- (7) If a report is filed with local law enforcement, the SSM must periodically check-in with local law enforcement and provide updates to the Volunteer and other relevant staff.
- (8) If requested by the Volunteer, or if staff identify an ongoing security concern, the SSM or an appropriate staff member must discuss a Safety Plan with the Volunteer (*see Annexes V and VI of the MS 243 Responding to Sexual Assault Procedures*). Safety Plan conversations must be documented in SIMS.
- (9) The SSM and PCMO must complete a Serious or Imminent Threat Assessment (SITA) Tool (*see Annex III in MS 243 Responding to Sexual Assault Procedures*) immediately upon notification of the following cases, as classified in the SIRG:
  - Sexual assault;
  - Aggravated physical assault at site;
  - Robbery at site;
  - Non-aggravated physical assault by a neighbor/host family member/coworker or that occurred at the Volunteer's residence/hotel/transit house/regional office;

- Stalking, and
  - Intimate partner violence (IPV).
- (i) If an imminent threat has been identified in a SITA or staff have concerns about the Volunteer's safety, the investigation, or protecting evidence, they must contact the PCSSO or Designated Security Specialist as soon as possible.
- (ii) The SSM and PCMO must document their assessment in an electronic SITA in SIMS within seven (7) calendar days from the date that the Volunteer reported the Incident. Refer to the SIMS Users Guide.
- (10) The SSM or an appropriate staff member must also complete a Post Incident Assessment (PIA) (*see Annex IV in MS 243 Responding to Sexual Assault Procedures*) in the following cases, as classified in the SIRG:
- Kidnapping;
  - Rape;
  - Aggravated sexual assault;
  - Non-aggravated sexual assault in cases where the offender is a neighbor, host family member, or coworker; the assault occurred in the Volunteer's residence; or the assault occurred in a Volunteer hotel, transit house, or regional office;
  - Robbery at site;
  - Aggravated physical assault at site;
  - Non-aggravated physical assault in cases where the offender is a neighbor, host family member, or coworker; or the assault occurred at the Volunteer's residence, hotel, transit house, or regional office;
  - Burglaries in cases where the Volunteer is present, repeat burglaries, or where the physical security of the Volunteer's residence has been compromised;
  - Peeping tom, night crawling, creeping;
  - IPV;
  - Stalking; or
  - Any other crime incident where an additional assessment is helpful, or the Designated Security Specialist (DSS) requests it.

- (i) The SSM or an appropriate staff member must document their assessment in an electronic PIA in SIMS within 14 calendar days from the date the Volunteer reported the Incident. Refer to the SIMS Users Guide.
- (b) In addition to the minimum standards above, the following are additional steps to be taken for specific Crimes.
  - (1) Burglary (in cases where the Volunteer is present, repeat burglaries, or where the physical security of the Volunteer's residence has been compromised)
    - (i) Immediately upon notification of the Incident, the SSM and PCMO must complete a SITA.
    - (ii) Staff must ensure that the Volunteer has a safe place to stay until an appropriate staff member or designee has inspected the Volunteer's residence. The Volunteer cannot return to the residence until all needed repairs have been completed.
    - (iii) The SSM or designee must complete a PIA. Assessments may include but are not limited to: speaking with the Volunteer, speaking with counterparts or community leaders, reaching out to local authorities, and traveling to the Volunteer's site.
    - (iv) Staff must provide OVA's contact information to the Volunteer. When possible, provide the Volunteer with an OVA wallet card.
    - (v) The PCMO must check-in with the Volunteer via email or phone within 72 hours of receiving the Incident report.
  - (2) Robbery and Aggravated Physical Assault
    - (vi) If the Incident occurs at the Volunteer's site, the SSM and PCMO must complete a SITA immediately upon notification of the Incident.
    - (i) If the Incident occurs at the Volunteer's site, then the SSM or designee must conduct a PIA. Assessments may include but are not limited to: speaking with the Volunteer, speaking with counterparts or community leaders, reaching out to local authorities, and traveling to the Volunteer's site.
    - (ii) Staff must provide OVA's contact information to the Volunteer. When possible, provide the Volunteer with an OVA wallet card.
    - (iii) PCMO must check-in with the Volunteer via email or phone within 24 hours of receiving the Incident report.
  - (3) Other Security Incident: Peeping Tom, Night Crawling, or Creeping

- (i) If the Incident occurs at site, then staff must make arrangements to provide for the Volunteer's safety until a PIA takes place. In most cases, this means moving the Volunteer to another residence, homestay family, nearby community, or having a trusted individual stay with the Volunteer.
  - (ii) A PIA must be completed. Assessments may include but are not limited to: speaking with the Volunteer, speaking with counterparts or community leaders, and traveling to site.
  - (iii) Staff must provide OVA's contact information to the Volunteer. When possible, provide the Volunteer with an OVA wallet card.
  - (iv) PCMO must check-in with the Volunteer via phone within 24 hours of receiving the Incident report.
- (4) Incidents that Involve IPV/Dating Violence
- (i) Immediately upon notification of the Incident, the SSM and PCMO must complete a SITA.
  - (ii) A PIA is also required, regardless of where the Incident(s) occurred.
  - (iii) If the Incident occurs at site, then staff must make arrangements to provide for the Volunteer's safety until a PIA takes place. In most cases, this means moving the Volunteer to another residence, homestay family, nearby community, or having a trusted individual stay with the Volunteer. If the Incident did not occur at site, staff must ensure that the Volunteer is at a location where the Volunteer can stay safely, separated from the offender. While attending to emotional safety needs it is important to recognize the stress the Volunteer may be experiencing and provide appropriate interpersonal support. In most cases, this means avoiding victim blaming language and providing support through active listening and validating language.
  - (iv) If the Volunteer was removed from site, a SITA and PIA must be completed before the Volunteer is returned to their site.
  - (v) SSM must immediately contact the PCSSO and Designated Security Specialist.
  - (vi) PCMO must immediately notify OVA.
  - (vii) PCMO must contact the Volunteer, provide interpersonal support, and offer other appropriate services such as BHO.
  - (viii) For Volunteer/Volunteer Incidents please see below. Refer to procedures in *IPS 1-12* and *MS 204 Volunteer Conduct*.

(5) Incidents that Involve Volunteer-on-Volunteer or Staff-on-Volunteer

- (i) Staff must ensure that the Volunteer is safe and take reasonable measures to keep the parties separate.
- (ii) Staff should not engage, contact, or notify the accused of the allegation.
- (iii) Staff should immediately notify the Office of Inspector General (OIG) of the allegation according to MS 861 *Office of Inspector General*.
- (iv) Staff should not, unless authorized by the agency or OIG, make any attempt to gather information or investigate the allegation.

(6) Incidents that Involve Sexual Assault or Stalking

- (i) Staff must follow procedures in MS 243 *Responding to Sexual Assault Procedures* and MS 242 *Stalking of a Volunteer* and ensure that Volunteer is safe and take reasonable measures to keep the parties separate.

- (c) If an Incident takes place during a medevac, staff receiving the initial report must ensure that the Volunteer is safe. These staff must then immediately inform OVA and the Designated Security Specialist for next steps.

### 3.0 Notifications

- (a) It is essential that Headquarters be notified about all Incidents against Volunteers. In most cases notification will be made by submitting a report through SIMS no later than three (3) business days after Post first learns of the Incident. Even if Post has notified Headquarters by telephone or email, a SIMS report must still be submitted.

USDH staff, PCMOs, and SSMs must be familiar with the notification protocols and have the emergency notification flowchart accessible. Please refer to Attachment B for a flow chart and phone numbers. Immediate notifications must be made by telephone in the following situations:

- (1) Volunteer death;
- (2) Volunteer kidnapping;
- (3) Volunteer disappearance exceeding 48 hours;
- (4) Serious/potential life-threatening injuries (vehicle accidents, fires, substance overdose, general severe accidents);
- (5) IPV or Domestic Violence;
- (6) Incidents where the accused is another Volunteer or a Peace Corps Staff member (includes contractors);

- (7) Any Incident that may garner significant public or media attention or has the potential to affect relationships between the host country, the Peace Corps, or the U.S. Embassy;
  - (8) Any Incident where a serious or imminent threat is identified; or
  - (9) When the Country Director requires immediate advice or assistance.
- (b) In cases of sexual assault, refer to MS 243 *Responding to Sexual Assault Procedures*, “Notification Flow Chart.”
  - (c) In cases of Stalking, refer to MS 242 *Stalking of a Volunteer Procedures* and contact the Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer (PCSSO). If the PCSSO is not available, contact the DSS at headquarters.
  - (d) Except in cases of Restricted Reports of Sexual Assault, if the offender is a Volunteer or staff member (including contractor), Post must notify the OIG using the OIG Reporting Hotline (+1 202-692-2915).
  - (e) If staff believes that a Volunteer has committed a Crime, then the Country Director must immediately notify the OIG, the Regional Director, and the Office of the General Counsel.

#### **4.0 Coordinated Agency Response System (CARS)**

- (a) In most circumstances, Post is equipped to respond to Volunteer victims of Crime without Headquarters involvement. In some cases, however, a coordinated effort between staff at Headquarters and Post may be necessary through the Coordinated Agency Response System (CARS).
- (b) CARS is comprised of individuals from key offices (called the CARS Team), who collaborate on the management and response to Crimes against Volunteers. CARS is intended as a mechanism for staff to seek inter-disciplinary collaborative input and assistance when navigating agency policies or procedures, as well as any challenges relating to Volunteer support.
  - (1) The CARS Team representatives from Post may include any staff who have a specific need to know and have a specific role in supporting the Volunteer, including, but not limited to:
    - (i) Country Director (CD);
    - (ii) Peace Corps Medical Officer (PCMO);
    - (iii) Safety and Security Manager (SSM);
    - (iv) Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer (PCSSO); and

- (v) In cases of sexual assault, the Sexual Assault Response Liaison (SARL).
- (2) The CARS Team representatives from Headquarters may include the following offices:
  - (i) Office of Safety and Security: Designated Security Specialist (DSS);
  - (ii) Office of Victim Advocacy (OVA): Associate Victim Advocate, Director of OVA;
  - (iii) Region: Regional Security Advisor (RSA), Chief of Operations (ChOps), Regional Director (RD);
  - (iv) Office of Health Services: Behavioral Health and Outreach (BHO), Field Support Unit and Forensic Nurse Specialist; and
  - (v) Office of the General Counsel: Regional Attorney and Sexual Assault Attorney.
- (c) Although representatives from the OIG is not part of the CARS Team, the CARS Team should, in cases where the Crime is suspected of having been committed by another Volunteer or a Peace Corps staff member (including a contractor), collaborate with OIG to ensure that Peace Corps staff are not taking actions that would compromise evidence or interfere with an OIG criminal or administrative investigation.

## **5.0 CARS Operations**

- (a) CARS coordination between Headquarters and Post should be accomplished through conference calling (phone, online platform, etc.).
- (b) Any member of the CARS Team may request to schedule a CARS conference call when enhanced coordination is necessary. This request should be made to OVA, OSS, or Regions for organizing CARS conference calls.
- (c) In most situations the initial CARS conference call will be scheduled within 3-5 days after Headquarters is notified of the Incident. CARS conference calls will normally try to accommodate both Post and Headquarters business hours, however, some situations may require that one or both parties convene the call during non-business hours. Urgent situations may require CARS conference calls immediately and during non-business hours. Members of the CARS Team are expected to make the necessary efforts to be present for CARS calls.
- (d) When evaluating whether or not a Volunteer can safely remain at site or continue service at Post, the CARS Team will consider the following factors:
  - (1) The Volunteer's wishes;



- (2) Post's ability to continue to provide adequate support to the Volunteer;
  - (3) The Volunteer's medical and mental health status, as well as follow-up needs;
  - (4) Potential safety risks to the Volunteer who reported the Incident and to other Volunteers;
  - (5) Volunteer's participation in the management of their personal safety and security;
  - (6) Response of host country officials and host community members to the Incident;
  - (7) The programmatic impact of the Incident; or
  - (8) Other concerns that may arise throughout the process.
- (e) Any CARS Team member who has concerns about a Volunteer's ability to continue service, for any reason, should convene a CARS conference call as soon as possible.
  - (f) Follow-up CARS calls may be scheduled by any member when there are any significant updates or developments (i.e., legal, safety, mental health) regarding an Incident.

## 6.0 Security Incident Management System (SIMS)

All Post and Headquarters staff communications, services, and follow-up provided to the Volunteer after an Incident must be noted in SIMS; clinical documentation outside of that which is required by SIMS documentation requirements will not be entered into SIMS.

### 6.1 Review of Sites with a History of Previous Volunteer Incidents

- (a) **As Posts consider re-using sites for new Volunteers during the site management process, the SSM must review safety and security Incidents that have occurred at sites that would prevent the placement of a Volunteer (see [Safety and Security Instruction \(SSI\) 401 Site History Documentation](#)). A site where a Volunteer reported being the victim of rape, aggravated sexual assault, non-aggravated sexual assault, robbery at site, burglary with Volunteer present, stalking, or aggravated physical assault, as classified in the SIRG, must be reviewed for ongoing threat if Post is considering such site.** If there is a SIMS report for the site and any type of Incident set out above has occurred at the site, review the information in SIMS, and complete a PIA. If a PIA was previously completed for the Incident and is on file, review the original PIA and determine whether any conditions have changed; and
- (b) Refer to the [SIMS User Guide](#) for guidance on how to document in SIMS any additional information that is required, including any decision on new Volunteer placement at the site.