

**Remarks by Peace Corps Director Aaron S. Williams**

**The President's Forum with Young African Leaders**

**Shriver Auditorium, Washington, DC**

*August 4th, 2010*

**As prepared for delivery**

Thank you for that warm introduction. As someone who has lived and worked in community development around the world for the last 30 years, I can't begin to tell you what an honor it is to be with you today. I am proud to join President Obama in welcoming you, and honoring your work and commitment to service -- you are the next generation of African leaders.

Before we begin the program, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Michelle Gavin and Ambassador Mary Yates with the National Security Council and Bruce Wharton with the State Department. Thank you for your support of this event and joining us today.

Peace Corps has enjoyed a special relationship with the communities of Africa for 50 years. Our volunteers desire to make a difference has improved the lives of millions of people around the world and their local communities in America when they return home.

The Peace Corps' mission, as created and developed by our founders President Kennedy and Sargent Shriver is simple -- but monumental -- to promote world peace and friendship. Our model of service has been successful since 1961. We send American volunteers overseas for two years at the request of a host country government who has asked for our technical assistance.

Throughout Peace Corps' history, a central mission of our Volunteers is to work alongside our host country partners as they work to meet their own development priorities. To date, 200,000 Americans have volunteered to serve with the Peace Corps. Nearly 72,000 Americans have served as Peace Corps volunteers in Africa. Perhaps some of you have your own personal stories about these Peace Corps Volunteers you met or knew over the years, and if so, I would be delighted if you would share them with us over the course of the day.

Today, nearly 8,000 Americans are serving as Peace Corps Volunteers serve in 77 countries -- 3,300 Volunteers are serving 29 countries in Africa. Our Africa programs represent nearly 40% of our Volunteers worldwide. We have been honored in recent years by being invited to expand our programs and partnerships in Africa. Over the last two years Peace Corps Volunteers have re-entered Sierra Leone, Liberia and Rwanda to work with local communities on education and public health initiatives.

The founders of Peace Corps understood that volunteering is something done best when it is based on the principle of cooperation -- we know we have a great deal to learn and that our

partner countries have a great deal to teach us. We also know that volunteering is not something we are uniquely exporting to countries abroad. The culture and history of service or volunteering, called by many different names, is alive and well in all of the countries in which we work.

We have learned that one way in which we can add value to the types of community development efforts, in which many of you are involved, is to help support local young leaders as they learn to become the catalysts of positive change in their communities, and to support grassroots organizations as they mobilize community members to volunteer. One of the tools we have developed to help our Volunteers and their partners, and one of the resources we would like to share with you today is the *V<sup>2</sup> Volunteerism Action Guide: Multiplying the Power of Service*. Peace Corps follows a volunteer service model that prioritizes four fundamental elements: 1. Create more opportunities for volunteering, participation and engagement; 2. Develop greater capacity among young leaders and organizations; 3. Build motivation for volunteering and social innovation; 4. Build the infrastructure for volunteering and service to sustain efforts over time.

These components, when mobilized together can help launch coordinated civic engagement and service movements. The vision is that ultimately, every young person sees themselves as a leader; as an essential contributor, and as someone who is capable and willing to make positive changes for themselves and their communities. We hope that our upcoming panel and breakout session will be an opportunity to explore this model of service.

While the call to service is the foundation of Peace Corps, we are also grateful to see this call growing exponentially around the world. In Ghana, this time last year, President Obama challenged African youth when he said: *“You can serve in your communities and harness your energy and education to create new wealth and build new connections to the world. You can conquer disease, and end conflicts, and make change from the bottom up. You can do that.”*

It is my honor to welcome you to Peace Corps today. Thank you for your commitment to service and I look forward to hearing about your experiences and ideas throughout the forum. Before we begin the panel and the larger conversation on service and sustainable public engagement, I would like to share with you a brief video about Peace Corps – this video is an introduction to our history, our legacy and our sincere hope in the power of promoting world peace and friendship with communities around the world. Thank you.

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