

MS 461 Crimes Against Volunteers and Trainees Procedures

Effective Date: January 25, 2024

Responsible Office: Office of Safety and Security

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](#).

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 Peace Corps' response should be 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 have a responsibility to provide 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 other information about Volunteer incidents should be treated with discretion and shared only with those who have a need to know. All Peace Corps staff who are involved in responding to incidents must comply with the agency's confidentiality policies, any violation of confidentiality is subject to immediate disciplinary action.

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 may require 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 SSM. If the Volunteer appears to be physically or emotionally distressed due to the incident, then the incident must also be reported to the PCMO.
 - (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 law enforcement.
 - (5) If the Volunteer has elected to report to local law enforcement, the SSM or an appropriate staff member must assist and accompany the Volunteer in filing the police report. A Volunteer should never be directed 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 security 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 law enforcement, the SSM must periodically check-in with law enforcement and provide updates to the Volunteer.
 - (8) The SSM and PCMO must complete a Serious or Imminent Threat Assessment (SITA) within 7 days of the report in the following cases: aggravated physical assault, robbery, stalking, and intimate partner violence.
 - (9) If an imminent threat has been identified during 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.
- (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 home has been compromised).
 - (i) Staff must ensure that the Volunteer has a safe place to stay until an appropriate staff member or designee has inspected the Volunteer's home. The Volunteer should not return to the home until any needed repairs have been completed.
 - (ii) The SSM or designee must complete a Post Incident Assessment (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.

- (iii) Staff must provide OVA's contact information to the Volunteer. When possible, provide the Volunteer with an OVA wallet card.
- (iv) 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

- (i) If the security incident occurs at the Volunteer's site, then the SSM or designee must conduct a PIA within 14 days of the report. 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 house, homestay family, nearby community, or having a trusted individual stay with the Volunteer.
- (ii) A PIA must be completed within 14 days. 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 Intimate Partner Violence/Dating Violence

- (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 house, 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 and be separate from the offender. While attending to emotional safety needs it is also 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 via skills such as active listening and validation.

- (ii) A SITA and PIA must be completed before the Volunteer is returned to their site.
 - (iii) SSM must immediately contact the PCSSO and Designated Security Specialist.
 - (iv) PCMO must immediately notify OVA.
 - (v) PCMO must contact the Volunteer, provide interpersonal support, and offer other appropriate services such as BHO.
 - (vi) For PCV/PCV incidents please see below. Refer to procedures in *IPS 1-12* and *MS 204 Volunteer Conduct*.
- (5) Incidents that Involve Volunteer-on-Volunteer/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.
 - (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 and/or Stalking
- (i) Staff must follow procedures in MS 243 and MS 242 and ensure that Volunteer is safe and take reasonable measures to keep the parties separate.
- (c) If an incident takes place during a medevac to Headquarters, 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 as SIMS is the agency's official record of the incident.

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) Intimate Partner Violence 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, 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) 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).
- (d) 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 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 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 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: Associate Victim Advocate (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;
 - (v) Office of the General Counsel: Regional Attorney
- (c) Although representatives from the OIG will not be 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 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 the agency's Security Incident Management System; clinical documentation outside of that which is required by SIMS documentation requirements will not be entered into SIMS.