

MS 465 Overseas Disappearance of Volunteer/Trainee

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MS 461 *Overseas Disappearance of Volunteer/Trainee Procedures*

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1.0 Purpose

This Manual Section establishes the policies applicable to the disappearance of a Volunteer or Trainee (V/T). For the purposes of this Manual Section, the terms disappearance and missing have the same meaning and the term V/T includes Peace Corps staff, as well as dependents of V/Ts or staff who are living with them. A disappearance of a V/T related to a hostage taking or kidnapping is covered by MS 466 *Kidnapping of Volunteer/Trainee*.

2.0 Authority

22 USC 2503(b)

3.0 Definitions

3.1 *Kidnapped:* A V/T will be considered “kidnapped” when the V/T has been unlawfully seized or detained against his/her will. There is no requirement that a demand for ransom be made. The term “kidnapped” includes hostage-taking where a V/T’s release is conditional upon demands being met. (If a V/T is kidnapped, follow the guidance in [MS 466](#).)

3.2 *Missing:* A V/T will be considered “missing” if, after 48 hours of trying, the Peace Corps is unable to locate or otherwise make direct contact with the V/T. Typically a V/T will only be declared missing after the Peace Corps post was unsuccessful at repeated attempts to locate or contact the V/T.

3.3 *Missing Endangered:* A V/T will be considered “missing endangered” if the missing V/T is suspected of having been the victim of a criminal act or if there is other reason to have specific concerns for the well-being of the V/T, such as if the V/T has a medical condition that requires medication or treatment or if there is indication that the V/T has suffered an injury.

3.4 *Reasonably Accounted for Volunteer:* A V/T will be considered to be reasonably accounted for when Peace Corps has a general sense of the V/T’s whereabouts.

3.5 *Unaccounted for Volunteer:* A V/T will be considered to be “unaccounted for” when Peace Corps post is unable to reasonably account for the V/T’s whereabouts or well-being. For example, a V/T does not appear at an appointed place and time or if the V/T misses a regularly scheduled check-in.

4.0 Policies

4.1 Because the safety and security of V/Ts is a paramount objective of the Peace Corps, it is the policy of the Peace Corps to use its available resources to promptly investigate and resolve any disappearance of a V/T.

4.2 A detailed record must be maintained of all actions taken in-country during the duration of an ongoing case of a V/T disappearance.

4.3 All personnel involved in resolving a disappearance of a V/T must be sensitive to the concerns of the next of kin of the missing V/T and must take appropriate actions to address their anxieties and fears.

4.4 Peace Corps employee assigned to a post must become familiar with the policies and implementing procedures relating to the disappearance of a V/T.

5.0 Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 Office of Safety and Security

The Associate Director for Safety and Security is responsible for the oversight of the safety and security programs for V/Ts under MS 270 Volunteer/Trainee Safety and Security. The Associate Director exercises management and supervision of the safety and security program for V/Ts through its Overseas Operations. In the event of a disappearance of a V/T, the Office of Safety and Security provides crisis management support and guidance to the Office of Global Operations, the Regional Director, the Country Director and other staff as appropriate.

5.2 Office of Global Operations

Through management of the geographical Regions where Peace Corps V/Ts are located the Associate Director for the Office of Global Operations has managerial responsibility for the safety and security of V/Ts under MS 270 Volunteer/Trainee Safety and Security. The Associate Director is responsible for overall supervision of the activities taken by the Office of Global Operations in the event of a disappearance of a V/T.

5.2.1 Regional Director

The Regional Director is the day-to-day crisis manager at Headquarters for a V/T disappearance and serves as the chief point of contact for Headquarters personnel who are participating with the post to resolve a V/T disappearance. (*See MS 465 Overseas Disappearance of Volunteer/Trainee Procedures.*)

5.2.2 Country Director

The Country Director is the on-scene crisis manager for the Peace Corps during a disappearance of a V/T and performs many of the duties necessary to resolve a V/T disappearance (*see MS 465 Procedures*). Duties of the Country Director include:

- (a) Making the initial notification of the V/T disappearance to Headquarters.
- (b) Determining if the V/T should be considered missing or missing endangered.
- (c) Identifying when a V/T should be considered “unaccounted for”.
- (d) Preparing the initial report of the disappearance of the V/T.
- (e) Taking appropriate actions to locate the missing V/T.

5.3 Behavioral Health and Outreach Unit

The Behavioral Health and Outreach Unit is responsible for contacting the next-of-kin of the missing V/T (*see MS 465 Procedures*).

6.0 Rewards

- (a) The Peace Corps may offer a reward for information regarding a missing V/T. No reward offer should be made public until it has been officially authorized as provided in this Manual Section.
- (b) If the Country Director deems a reward advisable, the Country Director must request the Regional Director for authority to offer the reward stating the reasons for a reward and the amount to be offered either in cash or in goods according to accepted cultural practice. In evaluating the request, the Regional Director must consult with the Associate Director for Safety and Security and the General Counsel and other offices, as appropriate.
- (c) The Regional Director is authorized to make the final determination to offer an award valued at up to \$10,000. A reward in excess of \$10,000 must be submitted through the Associate Director for the Office of Global Operations and approved by the Peace Corps Director.
- (d) The officer who authorizes the offer for a reward makes the final determination on whether to pay the reward, taking into account all relevant factors.
- (e) This Manual Section is not intended to affect the authorities of the OIG to provide rewards pursuant to MS 861 and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended.

7.0 Cost of Search

Any costs incurred in connection with the search effort, such as the use of a helicopter or payment for the assistance of a local host country search team, must be authorized by the Country Director with the concurrence of the Regional Director. Acquisition of search services must be conducted in accordance MS 732 Acquisition Regulations, Rules and Procedures – Overseas and U.S. and the Federal Acquisition Regulation.

8.0 Status of V/T during Disappearance

8.1 Leave Without Allowance

As soon as practical after learning of a disappearance, the Country Director must place the V/T on leave without allowance (LWOA) status (*see* subsection 6.5 of MS 220 *Leave for Volunteers/Trainees*) as of the date the individual was last reported to be at his or her project site. Leave without allowance status will stop the living allowance, except for required rent payments made directly to the landlord/utility companies, but will permit Peace Corps to continue to spend appropriated funds for further investigation and search.

In cases of disappearance, LWOA status will not stop the readjustment allowance. If the V/T is located and his or her disappearance was caused by conduct which would be grounds for administrative separation under MS 284 *Early Termination of Service*, the Country Director may stop the accrual of the readjustment allowance retroactive to the date of the reported

disappearance or other appropriate date. (Any monthly payments to a third party will be charged against the V/T's final payment of his or her readjustment allowance.) The Country Director must email to the Office of Volunteer and PSC Services the date of commencement of LWOA status.

8.2 Extension of Service during a Disappearance

If a V/T is still missing on the Completion of Service date of the V/T, the V/T may be extended by the Country Director for an additional three months or until his or her location is established, whichever is shorter. At the expiration of the initial extension of service, the Country Director may email the Regional Director (with a copy to Volunteer Financial Operations), requesting their concurrence to authorize a second extension of service not to exceed another three months. Extensions of service beyond six months may be authorized only by the Peace Corps Director.

8.3 Consequences of Absence without Leave

If a V/T is located and is found to have been absent without leave during the period of his or her disappearance, he or she may be administratively separated retroactive to the date of the reported disappearance at the discretion of the Country Director (*see* MS 284).

9.0 Effective Date

The effective date is the date of issuance.