



Our Mission:

Through audits, evaluations, and investigations, the Office of Inspector General provides independent oversight of agency programs and operations in support of the goals set forth in the Peace Corps Act while making the best use of taxpayer dollars.

PEACE CORPS Office of **INSPECTOR GENERAL**

Interim Update: Murder of Kate Puzey

In 2009, Peace Corps Volunteer Kate Puzey was murdered while serving in Benin, just after reporting concerns that a seasonal Peace Corps contractor was sexually abusing students. Her tragic death raised serious concerns with the agency's handling of Volunteer safety, security, and the confidentiality of Volunteer complaints. OIG has prioritized investigating Ms. Puzey's murder and the practices the agency used to protect Volunteers. Our investigations and reviews found significant flaws with the Peace Corps safety and security program, confidentiality policies, and response to victims of crime. The Peace Corps has made major reforms in response to these findings, which we have described below.

The Investigation and 2017 Trial

The U.S. Government has been assisting the Government of Benin with the ongoing investigation into Ms. Puzey's death since 2009. Peace Corps OIG's initial involvement in the case focused on the circumstances surrounding the related disclosure of confidential information, including the role of agency staff and contractors. Subsequently, OIG special agents participated in an interagency team with law enforcement partners from the FBI and DSS to assist the Beninese authorities to resolve the murder. At the request of the Government of Benin, the team made numerous field visits to assist Beninese counterparts in the collection and documentation of evidence.

On February 25, 2017, a Beninese court of seven jury members (three Beninese judges and four Beninese civilians) concluded the criminal proceedings related to Ms. Puzey's murder. Representatives of the Peace Corps and OIG attended the trial with Ms. Puzey's family members. An OIG special agent testified extensively on investigative findings regarding a breach of Ms. Puzey's confidentiality when she reported concerns about the conduct of a Peace Corps contractor to Peace Corps staff. This breach may have allowed the subject of her concern to discover her accusation and her identity as the complainant.

Ultimately, all four defendants were acquitted. Three of the defendants had been incarcerated for eight years pending trial, and one had been incarcerated for three years.

Despite the extensive investigative fieldwork conducted in Benin and other resources devoted to this investigation by the Beninese Gendarmerie, the Peace Corps OIG, the FBI, and the Regional Security Office of the U.S. Embassy in Benin, the case remains unresolved.

OIG and our partners continue to seek justice for Ms. Puzey. Our investigation will remain open pending new evidence or information leading to a resolution of the case.

Peace Corps Reform Following Ms. Puzey's Murder

In conducting our investigative activity, we uncovered a serious lack of internal controls and breaches of security protocols. As a result, OIG audited the safety and security program in 2010 and performed a follow-up review in 2015.

Among our most significant findings in 2010, the Audit Unit found that the safety and security program lacked clear management structure. No single office accepted ownership of Volunteer safety. The Office of Safety and Security served as a consultative office rather than an oversight office with the ability to implement and enforce its recommendations. In the 2015 follow-up, the Audit Unit found the safety and security program had evolved, making substantial progress to address safety and security needs. Significantly, the Peace Corps entered into a partnership with the Department of State, allowing the Peace Corps to access the expertise of the regional security officers in each country's embassy. We made further recommendations for improving the program, including in the areas of training, implementing safety and security recommendations, and measuring performance. The Peace Corps implemented all OIG safety and security recommendations from its 2015 follow up review.

A law bearing Ms. Puzey's name, the Kate Puzey Peace Corps Volunteer Protection Act of 2011, required the Peace Corps put additional measures in place to enhance Volunteer safety and security, protect Volunteer whistleblowers, and improve the Peace Corps' response to victims of sexual assault. OIG has extensively reviewed the Peace Corps' implementation of the program, issuing

nine reports since 2011 – seven required by the Act and two directly related to the subject of sexual assault response – to ultimately improve the way the Peace Corps responds to Volunteers who have been sexually assaulted. The Evaluation Unit conducted over 240 interviews with staff, 70 interviews with Volunteers, reviewed nearly 200 sexual assault case files, and conducted field work in 6 countries specifically to assess how the Peace Corps has implemented this Act.

In the years since Ms. Puzey's death, the Peace Corps has made substantial reforms to protect Volunteers. It has changed its Volunteer safety and security program, improved the professionalization and training of staff, executed an MOU with the Department of State to address Volunteer safety and security, enhance confidentiality protections for Volunteers, and develop a comprehensive sexual assault risk response and reduction program. Volunteers are now trained on how to report wrongdoing and staff are trained on how to handle Volunteer concerns confidentially.

OIG continues to prioritize our oversight of programs for Volunteer safety, security, and medical care, and we will continue to make recommendations to help the Peace Corps keep Volunteers healthy and safe.

Contact

Have questions? Need to talk to us?

Hotline

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