

**Remarks of Carol Spahn, Director of the Peace Corps**  
**Ceremonial Swearing-in of the 21<sup>st</sup> Director of the Peace Corps**

Peace Corps Headquarters | Washington, DC

January 11, 2023 | 9:30-10:30AM ET

Good morning, friends and family, staff, partners, and Volunteers – it means so much to me that you are here today – and that we have teams and friends from around the world joining us virtually.

I am so grateful to be a part of this amazing, global community.

And it is an incredible honor to have special guests with us this morning:

Congressman Garamendi, thank you for your endless support of the Peace Corps and for your kind words. You and your wife Patty have contributed so much to the Peace Corps' mission and story over the years.

Secretary Chao, Congressman Shays, Chief Executive Officer Albright, President Aviel – Thank you for all that you do to support the Peace Corps, keeping the Peace Corps top-of-mind and in the hearts of our colleagues on the Hill, in the White House, and at other Government Agencies and Departments.

Former Peace Corps Directors, I have said it before, and I will say it again: you have given me big shoes to fill. Thank you for all your mentorship and support, and a special thank you to Dr. Jody Olsen who saw leadership potential in me back in 2020.

And a very, very special thank you to my daughter Casey, my daughter Emily (she's on joining us virtually; hi Emily!), and my husband Andy. Andy and I served as Peace Corps Volunteers together in Romania, and he has quite literally been with me on this journey every step of the way. Thank you.

President Biden, in his first presidential speech to the UN General Assembly, said, "Whether we choose to fight for our shared future or not – will reverberate for generations yet to come. Simply put: We stand, in my view, at an inflection point in history."

And, he promised, "We will lead not just with the example of our power but, God willing, with the power of our example."

I have thought a lot about what to say in this moment – to this community, this agency that I love (that we all love) in all its infinite possibility and with its audacious mission. An organization that asks more of us than we ever thought possible to give – and a mission that drives us to show up with our full selves, ready to do whatever it takes, and to lead through the power of our example.

This has been no easy task since the global evacuation in March of 2020. We continue to work through a profoundly disruptive and pivotal period in history. A time when so much of what we know – basic norms and expectations – have been called into question. When war, climate change, and COVID have set back development progress. An inflection point.

A time when each and every one of us carries a great responsibility – as we shape our shared future – to do so with intention, in both word and deed.

Over the past two years at the Peace Corps, we challenged ourselves to 'meet the moment'. This has meant that every team has had to recalibrate, shift, and stretch to reimagine service, strengthen systems, and advance equity. It has been impressive and exhausting. Our teams in the field have stepped up to

provide direct support for e-learning, vaccination campaigns, food security, and other projects, and our teams at headquarters have worked tirelessly to adapt and strengthen the agency in countless ways.

We fielded Volunteers domestically, for the second time in history, to support COVID response efforts. And we stood up a Virtual Service Pilot – at the request of host governments – with virtual participants who supported partners in more than 40 countries. Now, thanks to the exceptional work of recruiters like Anastasia, our national anthem singer, and staff around the world, we are back in almost 50 countries, with 900 Volunteers paving the way.

This is just the beginning of an exciting and long journey – not just to rebuild, but also to reshape the Peace Corps, building on the strongest of foundations, responding to today's needs and looks ahead to tomorrow's.

It is a good thing that apathy is not in our vocabulary. For decades, our harshest critics and greatest admirers – stakeholders from around the world – have constantly challenged us to be truer to our values, more intentional, bolder, braver, more adaptive – at every level. And we welcome it and step up to meet the challenge. Because we care deeply about the integrity of what it means to be the Peace Corps.

Just a few weeks ago, I had the distinct honor of swearing in the first-ever group of Peace Corps Volunteers in Viet Nam. Viet Nam is our 143<sup>rd</sup> partner country and the ceremony was the culmination of the work of countless people in this room and around the world.

After spending several days with staff and Volunteers, I was struck by how the Peace Corps/Viet Nam staff – all brand new to Peace Corps – had created a team culture that embodies the Peace Corps' values.

And by how the Volunteers – like our first-ever Volunteers to swear-in in Montenegro this year – were already demonstrating the cultural humility, openness, respect, resilience, flexibility, and patience that are the foundation upon which we build peace and friendship, one relationship at a time.

It is this ethos that binds us together as a global community and drives so many of us to identify as part of the Peace Corps family for the rest of our lives. It also creates the magic – a term that is used frequently to capture the essence or the 'special sauce' – that makes us who we are.

I wish that long term 'magic' was a metric that could be easily measured and explained. In fact, I have been asked multiple times for advice from other organizations who want to replicate it, but I can't really put into words exactly how it is created or what the Peace Corps' 'magic' is.

Rather, it comes to life in feelings and moments that can pass in a split second but remain cemented in memory for life.

It is the nervous anticipation of a family who opens their hearts and home to welcome a stranger and the naïve excitement of an invitee who chooses to embrace uncertainty and take a leap into the unknown.

It is the raw humility and honest curiosity with which Trainees and staff learn and teach how to live in a new context – from cultural norms and practices to how to do everyday things – from washing clothes and taking baths, to buying, growing, and cooking food.

And it is that same open-hearted vulnerability of counterparts who unveil their most difficult challenges and their most precious dreams for their communities.

It is the two-way joy and pride of communicating in another language and culture enough to share your humor and have deep, meaningful conversations with the women in your women's group, truly understanding what is said – and left unsaid – for the first time.

It is the sense of deep calm the first time a Volunteer returns to the village and realizes that they are home...

Or the welcome sense of belonging – of having brothers and sisters in a foreign country.

It is the power of human connection.

This connection comes to life in unexpected ways and moments of pride, often decades later – in impact that can't be captured in a reporting tool or directly measured – and that demonstrate how two years of service can turn into a lifetime. I am blessed to hear these stories all the time and wish that I could bottle them to share with the world. It is things like:

In 2007, when a chief in the Democratic Republic of Congo texted Dr. Peter Kilmarx, a Peace Corps Volunteer who he had worked alongside decades earlier to alert him to unusual symptoms in the village, which spurred the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to action and contained an Ebola outbreak.

Or last year, when returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs), staff, and friends of the Peace Corps, including our team in Moldova, mobilized overnight to support Ukrainians after the brutal and unprovoked attack by Russia, providing funds, information, refugee assistance, and emotional support. They were some of the first movers and – almost a year later – their support continues.

In May, the President of Colombia honored RPCV Maureen Orth with citizenship for her ongoing contributions to the country, especially in education.

And in September, Presidents and Prime Ministers of Pacific Island Countries sought me out to share how Peace Corps was 'part of them' and how much they would value our return.

There is so much more.

Peace Corps has an intricately woven history and legacy, and I would like to honor the 143 countries, 241,000 host communities and Volunteers, tens of thousands of staff, and millions of individuals – students, farmers, environmentalists, health workers, entrepreneurs, teachers, young people, and leaders big and small – who have opened their arms, taken a chance, and become valued members of the Peace Corps family.

The Peace Corps is much more than one Volunteer, one community, or two years.

After nearly 62 years, we are now a powerful network of grassroots changemakers around the world.

As the 21st Director, during this pivotal and rapidly changing time, it is my commitment that – together – we will draw on the best of Peace Corps to make it more accessible, to engage in new ways, and to expand impact.

We will leverage the strength of our participatory approach, our global network, and our foundational belief that every individual, every action can make a difference.

We will harness the energy and motivation of young people around the world.

And we will not only meet the moment but will also do so with the kind of joy I see when our teams come together – when we smile with our eyes, laugh with our whole bodies, and dance in the middle of the day, in the middle of a field.

It won't be easy – and there will be plenty of bumps on the road as we navigate this new era, but we will continue to offer each other grace along the way.

At the Peace Corps, I always find something that speaks to my heart, reminds me that there is more to learn, and teaches me time and time again that relationships and experiences – those moments and feelings that stick – are what gives life meaning and purpose. And are what – at the end of the day – make a difference.

It is the honor of a lifetime to lead this agency. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for sharing this journey with me.