

Written Testimony of Carolyn Hessler-Radelet, Nominated to be the 19th Director of the Peace Corps
As Prepared for the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

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Introduction

Thank you, Chairman Markey, Ranking Member Barrasso, and members of the Committee for having me here today. I am honored to come before you to seek confirmation to be the next Director of the Peace Corps.

I am deeply grateful to President Obama for nominating me to be the 19th Director of the Peace Corps. It has been an honor to serve in his administration, first as Deputy and now as Acting Director.

I would like to thank Senator Wofford for his kind introduction today, and his leadership and support of the Peace Corps. There is no one who has done more to further the cause of national service than Harris Wofford. He is a true American hero.

I would also like to thank my husband, Steve, and my children, Meghan and Sam, for all their love and support.

Serving as a member of the Peace Corps staff has been one of the great privileges of my life. I am so grateful to my fellow staff members throughout the world for their dedication to the mission of Peace Corps and their unwavering support for our Volunteers.

I also especially want to acknowledge the Peace Corps Volunteers, past and present, who have served our nation and our host countries with such dedication and purpose. We owe them a debt of gratitude. Everywhere I go in the Peace Corps world, I hear testimonies to the impact Volunteers have had on their communities. How their after-school tutoring helped students to pass their national exams; or how the bed nets they distributed kept babies safe from malaria. How our Volunteers helped their community to plant *moringa* trees or build wells and latrines to protect their families from cholera.

Presidents and pastors, community members and corporate leaders, midwives and members of Parliament from 139 nations around the world have told the story of how Peace Corps Volunteers helped them imagine a different future for themselves and how they demonstrated the kindness of the American people. Our Volunteers have done so much to promote a positive image of the United States and further the cause of peace throughout the world, and I am so very grateful for their service.

My Personal Peace Corps History

My history with the Peace Corps runs deep. Four generations and six members of my family have served as Peace Corps Volunteers, including my aunt, both of my grandparents, my husband, my nephew, and myself.

I am here before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee today as someone who is passionate about the Peace Corps. My husband and I served as Peace Corps Volunteers in Western Samoa from 1981-1983. We were teachers at an all-girls school in the village of Leulumoega. We spent several nights a week with Losa and Viane, a typical Samoan family with eight children under the age of 15. They lived in an open sided *fale*, or traditional house, with a thatched roof and no walls.

Losa and her family were our mentors, our tour guides, our personal language and culture instructors, and our window into the Samoan world. They were also our friends. We debated politics and religion and talked about their hopes and dreams for their children. We cooked food over an open fire and sang songs and danced into the evening.

For me, my future career in public health came with Losa's announcement that she was pregnant with her ninth child. Tears streamed down her face as she expressed her deep concern about her pregnancy. Money was very tight and she was exhausted by the rhythm of her life – a seemingly endless monotony of cooking, washing clothes by hand, farming and going to market. She could hardly bear the thought of one more mouth to feed.

I went through every day of that pregnancy with her. Through her experience, I came to understand the challenges faced by many women in traditional societies in accessing quality health care for herself and her children. Losa nearly lost her life when she started hemorrhaging while giving birth to that final, beautiful baby girl, Makarita.

For me, that was a call to arms, and my career was set from that point on in maternal and child health – a career that led me directly back to Peace Corps 25 years later. My time as a Volunteer changed my life. It shaped my passion for international development and it launched my career in public health.

If confirmed, I will work to ensure that Americans who want to serve have the opportunity to make a difference overseas with the Peace Corps, and to bring their experience back home to enrich their communities here in the United States.

Progress Over the Past Three Years

It has been a privilege to serve the Peace Corps community over the past three years, first as Deputy Director and Chief Operating Officer, and for the past year, as Acting Director.

During my time with the Peace Corps, I spearheaded an extensive reform effort to modernize and strengthen all aspects of our operations. With the active support of Congress, and under the leadership of then-Peace Corps Director Aaron Williams, the agency conducted a comprehensive assessment that looked at all aspects of Peace Corps' operations.

As a result, we have dramatically improved the quality of our support to Volunteers, particularly in the area of health care and safety and security.

We have instituted a new Country Portfolio Review process that guides agency decisions on where and how we allocate Volunteer placement throughout the world. As a result, we now strategically target Peace Corps' resources and country presence to maximize impact, using data to guide our decision-making and improve performance.

We are streamlining Peace Corps' management and operations by using modern technology, innovative approaches and improved business processes to create a culture of excellence.

These reforms, among others, have positioned our agency to make an even greater impact in the years ahead.

Vision for the Future

I envision the Peace Corps as a dynamic, forward-leaning champion for international service. I envision a Peace Corps that is defined by its energy, innovation and impact.

I see it as *the* place for Americans who are drawn to service abroad. I see a Peace Corps that plays a major role in helping our country make a real difference in the lives of the world's poor.

Most importantly, I see Peace Corps Volunteers who – through their experience – show the world the compassion, tolerance and dedication to service that has always characterized the American people.

If confirmed, I will lead the Peace Corps toward this vision by concentrating on four key areas: increasing visibility and outreach; strengthening partnerships to help our country achieve our development goals; improving the quality of our technical training for Volunteers so they can deliver impact in their communities and build their skills to become the next generation of American global leaders; and continuing to strengthen the quality of our Volunteer support.

First, I will seek to revitalize recruitment and outreach to ensure that every American knows about the Peace Corps. We will build a robust recruitment and outreach strategy that reaches a wider, broader audience to not only increase the number of Volunteers, but also to field a Volunteer force that reflects the rich diversity of the American people. And we will promote the incredible contribution that returned Peace Corps Volunteers have made and continue to make in their communities back home in the United States.

Second, I will ensure that Peace Corps aligns our work more effectively with other development and citizen diplomacy initiatives in the countries in which we serve. In particular, Peace Corps can and should play a bigger role in helping our country achieve its goals through our major development initiatives, such as PEPFAR, Feed the Future, and the President's Malaria Initiative. By working in closer alignment with other development partners, we can ensure that investments on the ground are owned by the community, implemented properly, sustained over time, and monitored and evaluated. In addition, through better coordination, our highly-skilled Peace Corps Response Volunteers can magnify the impact and sustainability of our nation's development and citizen diplomacy work.

Third, we will build the capacity of Volunteers to achieve measurable results in their host communities. One of our most important new initiatives is our *Focus-In Train-Up* strategy, which dramatically strengthens the quality of our technical training and program support for Volunteers. As part of that strategy, Peace Corps is partnering with host governments, universities, NGOs, and donors to ensure that our Volunteers are focusing on those projects that are wanted by their communities, and have proven through evidence, to be most effective at achieving development results. We are monitoring and evaluating our efforts so we can gauge, with certainty, the impact of our work. By giving them the training, tools and experience they need, our Volunteers will increase impact today in their host communities, while becoming the next generation of American global leaders for tomorrow.

Finally, and most important, I will continue to strengthen Peace Corps' care and support for our Volunteers. Our Volunteers are the backbone of our agency. We are committed to providing them with the support they need to be healthy, safe and productive throughout their service.

Peace Corps is one of America's best ideas, and perhaps our government's best tool for promoting a better understanding of Americans on the part of other peoples. By living and working among them, Volunteers develop strong relationships with their host communities and countries, ensuring that they have a positive perception of the United States, that they share our values, and have a desire to actively engage with our country and the world. And when our Volunteers return to the U.S., forever changed by their experience, they pass on their knowledge, skills and ideas wherever they go for the rest of their lives. They are our future leaders, and the ripple effect of their global outlook spreads wherever they go.

Conclusion

The world we face today is qualitatively different from the world in which the Peace Corps was created. Today more than ever before, the security and economic prosperity of the United States is inextricably linked with that of other nations. Our own country is changing as well, becoming increasingly diverse and multicultural.

We need globally competent citizens who can understand other people's perspectives and find areas of commonality with our own. Thriving in a world of diversity involves communicating effectively with diverse audiences – including a more diverse American population. Peace Corps is one of our country's best tools to create a globally competent American workforce.

Our team is prepared to take Peace Corps to an entirely new level of engagement that will achieve even greater impact for our nation and the nations in which we serve.

As testimony to the critical role of Peace Corps, this is what President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, the first democratically elected female President in Africa, had to say about our Volunteers last month:

“Peace Corps Volunteers are visible evidence that the people of the United States stand with us – stand with us for peace, for prosperity, for justice and equality. By living and working among us, your Volunteers help us to create the conditions where hope and kindness and opportunity can flourish. They make such a powerful difference in the lives of my people.”

Peace Corps Volunteers are special people. They are motivated by a spirit of service and a passion for helping others, especially those most in need. They come with the tools of the 21st century but the heart and soul of a timeless Peace Corps. They have an urgency to help our country meet the needs of our fractured world.

That is why I am here today: because I care deeply about our mission and our Volunteers who serve our country around the world. I am so grateful for their dedication to service. If confirmed, I am committed to serving them as their Director of the Peace Corps.

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