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*The Next Step in Changing the World*

April 4, 2014

TO: The Honorable Kay Granger  
The Honorable Nita Lowey  
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs  
HT-2 Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20515

FROM: Glenn Blumhorst  
President  
National Peace Corps Association

Dear Chairwoman Granger and Ranking Member Lowey,

I write to urge the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs to support an appropriation of \$400 million for the Peace Corps in Fiscal Year 2015.

In September 2013, the world watched in horror as gunmen occupied an upscale shopping mall in Nairobi, Kenya, killing dozens and wounding nearly 200. Amid the violence and the chaos, the Kenya Red Cross was immediately on the scene, providing resources, support and comfort to the victims.

Three months prior to this tragedy, the President of the Kenya Red Cross Society, Dr. Mohamud Sheikh Nurein Said, was on Capitol Hill meeting with congressional leaders as the 2013 winner of the National Peace Corps Association's Harris Wofford Global Citizen Award. Dr. Said was accompanied by Kenya Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Russell Morgan, one of the Peace Corps Volunteers who nearly fifty years earlier inspired Dr. Said to pursue a lifelong career of serving others.

Since 1961 and to this day, there are literally tens of thousands of stories – large and small – of individuals across the globe whose lives were changed for the better because of the Peace Corps. These are stories of friendship, individual and community empowerment, improving livelihoods and saving lives.

Collectively, these stories are very difficult to quantify. **But what is not difficult to quantify is this: At a cost of less than \$1.20 per person/per year, the Peace Corps is America's best bargain.**

As the House of Representatives considers a Fiscal Year 2015 budget that proposes a return to increased defense spending<sup>1</sup>, we respectfully suggest that a modest investment in the cause of peace is equally warranted.

With an Acting Director of the Peace Corps awaiting a final (and an expected unanimous) confirmation vote in the Senate, we respectfully suggest that she and her team be provided adequate support to move the agency forward with key initiatives allowing the Peace Corps to continue meeting development challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**A Return to \$400 Million:** We applaud you and your Senate counterparts for providing Peace Corps with a Fiscal Year 2014 appropriation of \$379 million – the agency’s first funding increase in four years. While this is a positive step forward, it is important to note that when adjusted for inflation, this appropriation remains \$50 million below the buying power that might have been achieved, had Congress maintained a pathway of support set forth with its \$400 million Peace Corps appropriation in FY 2010.<sup>2</sup> A return in FY 2015 to \$400 million will continue to allow for a necessary course correction on a variety of fronts:

- **Volunteer Recruitment:** One of the stated goals of Acting Peace Corps Director Carrie Hessler-Radelet is to re-energize volunteer recruitment efforts to identify and engage the very best possible candidates for Peace Corps service. Last year, a new application system was launched to allow prospective volunteers to assess the status of their application. Efforts are also underway to shorten and streamline the application process, including giving candidates for service more input in their country selection.<sup>3</sup> In an address at the National Press Club to mark the 53<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Executive Order that established the Peace Corps, Hessler-Radelet said the following:

*“...we’re revitalizing recruitment and outreach so that every American knows about the Peace Corps. We want to re-ignite the passion that characterized Peace Corps’ early days – not just among Volunteers, who are already passionate – but among the American public writ large. So we’re expanding our recruitment staff, embracing new media platforms for telling our story, and casting a wider net than ever before. I’ve challenged my recruitment team to double the number of applications we receive – not just to grow our reach, but to field a Volunteer force that reflects the rich diversity of the American people, and represents the very best of the United States.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Ryan Budget Calls for Return to Pre-Sequester Defense Spending – National Journal, April 1, 2014

<sup>2</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, CPI inflation calculator. \$400 million in 2010 has the same buying power as \$430.68 million in 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Peace Corps 2015 Congressional Budget Justification, page viii

The current Peace Corps applicant to volunteer ratio stands at approximately three-to-one.<sup>4</sup> The initiatives outlined above will certainly result in a significant jump in applications. The question we confront is whether the Peace Corps – and Congress – will meet the placement needs for additional, excellent volunteers or face the prospect of having to inform hundreds of highly qualified individuals from across the country that they cannot be accepted into service in a timely manner due to a lack of funds.

- **Country Requests:** If more Peace Corps Volunteers are accepted into service, is there room for expansion? The answer is absolutely yes. For far too many years, the agency has had to turn away requests from interested nations to have Peace Corps Volunteers. As many as twenty countries have reportedly seen such requests go unfulfilled, and the opening (or re-opening) of Peace Corps programs in new countries has slowed considerably in the last 2 – 3 years. At the same time, many nations that have current programs have petitioned the Peace Corps to send more volunteers.
- **Volunteers in the Field:** As recently as four years ago the number of Peace Corps Volunteers and trainees in the field was approaching 9,000. However current figures project those numbers are now hovering at or below 7,000.<sup>5</sup> This decline of approximately 20% comes after a period in which the agency had reached a forty-year high, and corresponds directly with reductions in funding.
- **Volunteer Health, Safety and Security:** Both the Peace Corps and the Congress emphasize the importance of ensuring the health, safety and security of Peace Corps Volunteers. At the same time, it is imperative that Congress provide sufficient funding to ensure that improvements can be carried out. The agency continues to address the requirements of the Kate Puzey Peace Corps Volunteer Protection Act. With an Office of Victim Advocacy and trained sexual assault liaisons at each post, a much improved response infrastructure is in place. These improvements are part of the final stages of agency implementation of its Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response Program. At the same time, the Peace Corps and the National Peace Corps Association have been involved with the group Health Justice for Peace Corps Volunteers to explore agency improvements and privately supported efforts to address the challenges long-term health issues or injuries that occur during service.

In addition to the items outlined above, there are a number of other reasons why returning Peace Corps funding to \$400 million is warranted:

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<sup>4</sup> Based on Peace Corps statistics for Fiscal Year 2013

<sup>5</sup> Peace Corps 2015 Congressional Budget Justification. Peace Corps Authorizations and Appropriations FY 1962-FY2014, pages 5-6

- **Private Investment:** It is imperative that public funds continue to provide the necessary infrastructure and baseline support for a strong and successful Peace Corps. At the same time, it is important to note that this modest public investment has been triggering millions of dollars of private support to address grassroots development: 1) Across the nation, Returned Peace Corps Volunteers have self-organized into groups based on the community where they now live or the country where they served. Approximately 140 National Peace Corps Association member groups – found in at least forty states, serve as engines of charity and volunteerism that not only support projects overseas, but also community needs here at home. 2) Thousands of small-scale development projects of serving volunteers are not funded by taxpayer dollars, but rather supported through the privately funded Peace Corps Partnership Program. Over the past five years, nearly 4,000 of these projects have generated more than \$10 million in private investment, providing benefit to an estimated 4.5 million individuals. 3) Most recently, the National Peace Corps Association, the Peace Corps agency and Google joined in an innovative collaboration through which 1,000 Nexus 7 tablets donated by Google are being strategically provided to selected Peace Corps programs to further enhance the development work of volunteers.

We strongly believe that these examples of support for the Peace Corps through private funds should be recognized and strengthened through further public investment.

- **Strategic Partnerships:** In addition to private initiatives, the agency continues to build effective partnerships with other U.S. government agencies to address key international development objectives. A significant collaboration with the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) continues in 28 countries. At the same time, more than 3,000 Volunteers are working in 22 programs across Africa to help advance the President's Malaria Initiative. Addressing food security through the Feed the Future Initiative enables Peace Corps Volunteers to receive training and resources in partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development. In all of these cases, Volunteers provide a grassroots, community-based presence which leads to further innovation and long-term effectiveness in addressing these major development initiatives.
- **Meaningful Jobs/Meaningful Skills:** It is always important to note, especially at a time of high unemployment, that Peace Corps volunteers who are serving our nation overseas are American citizens who are gaining many significant technical and interpersonal skills that benefit the individual, not to mention the future employer, when s/he returns home and joins our workforce. Many of these volunteers enter professions that serve our communities. A 2011 commissioned survey found that 33 percent of RPCVs in the last decade became involved in education. An equal number entered the non-profit sector, while 15 percent of RPCVs entered the field of health care.

In her recent National Press Club remarks, Acting Director Hessler-Radelet recalled a recent conversation with Alpha Conde, the President of Guinea, during which he said the following:

*“I had a Peace Corps Volunteer teacher who was the first person I can remember who believed I had a future outside the boundaries of my village...When it came time for me to take my national exams, I passed. I was one of four people that year who qualified for university. I am certain I would not be President today if not for his support and encouragement. And he is a lifelong friend to this day...”*

*“By (Peace Corps’) presence, you tell my people that Americans care about them – that my people are so important to you that you are willing to travel thousands of miles from home to learn our language, eat our food (even though it makes your bellies sick), work with us on our priorities. Your being there validates my people even more than the millions of dollars of foreign assistance your country sends my country every year. My people are proud to teach you their language, their way of life, their culture. They are proud to call you family. You give them a hand up, not a hand out. And that makes all the difference.”*

The National Peace Corps Association strongly urges you and your congressional colleagues to continue to allow the Peace Corps to “make all the difference”. For individuals across the globe, for Volunteers who want the opportunity to serve our nation, and for communities in our country who benefit when those Volunteers come home.

Thank you for your consideration of this request for \$400 million for the Peace Corps in Fiscal Year 2015.