

From: Namji Steinemann [namjis@mac.com]
Sent: Monday, April 27, 2009 12:10 PM
To: TIATestimony
Subject: SUPPORT FOR PEACE CORPS EXPANSION ACT OF 2009

Dear Senator English:

I am writing in support of the Peace Corps Expansion Act of 2009.

As I'm sure you have heard many volunteers say, Peace Corps service continues long after volunteers leave their posts. Peace Corps volunteers have contributed to the development of our country of service (in my case, as a teacher at a secondary school in rural Thailand during mid-1980s) while also fulfilling our second Peace Corps pledge, "to promote a better understanding of the American people on the part of the peoples served." And, many of us continue our service to the United States by applying our knowledge of a new world region not to mention our extensive contacts and our new know-how to strengthen American understanding of the world and its peoples -- in my case, as Director of AsiaPacificED Program at the East-West Center, and previously as Vice President of Education Program at the Asia Society in New York.

Those who understand the impact of Peace Corps service know that the Peace Corps is and has always been not just about promoting social and economic improvements in developing nations that we are assigned to. Rather, it has been as much if not more about doing America's public diplomacy work - that of winning the "hearts and minds" of peoples of the world through the actions of individual Peace Corps volunteers, who, in turn, embody the goodwill of the American people and of our nation. In a world divided and filled with conflicts and at a time when the United States is working diligently to reinvigorate our foreign policy and burnish America's image abroad, the work of the Peace Corps is as vital today as it was at its founding during the height of the Cold War.

Despite this, the Peace Corps is neglected and under-funded. In 2009, the United States will send fewer than 3,500 Peace Corps volunteers - less than half the number in 1966. Over 20 nations without Peace Corps missions have requested volunteers. These have included Indonesia (the world's 4th largest nation with the largest Islamic population in the world), Vietnam, and Sierra Leone (which has seen grotesque human rights violations, resulting in over 50,000 people killed and more than one million people displaced since 1991 when the civil war erupted). However, due to insufficient funds, Peace Corps cannot respond. In 2008 alone, over 13,000 people applied to become volunteers, a 16% increase over 2007. The number of minority applicants and applicants over the age of 50 also rose by double digits in the last year. The desire for Americans to serve our country through Peace Corps service is matched by a long list of countries that want volunteers. Therefore, this is an appropriate time to grow and revitalize Peace Corps.

Nearly 50 years of Peace Corps' successful 'experiment' have shown that sharing skills and cross-cultural understanding through the work of Peace Corps volunteers is not only an effective but also cost-effective means to reestablishing our credibility and moral standing abroad, while exposing people to the core American values of peace, progress, tolerance and prosperity. As such, investing in Peace Corps would help to achieve long-term benefits for the United States as well as the rest of the world.

In closing, I reiterate my strong support for the Peace Corps Expansion Act 2009 and seek your support for it as well.

Sincerely,