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*The Next Step in Changing the World*

March 20, 2013

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 2014.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that when adjusted for inflation, the \$400 Million provided for the Peace Corps in FY 2010 would be the equivalent of \$425 Million in 2013. While returning to \$400 Million would not result in the same buying power as four years ago, it would bring the Peace Corps back towards a path of sustainable and measurable progress.

In testimony submitted one year ago, the National Peace Corps Association expressed concern about "funding levels that will lead to a marked rollback" on the notable progress achieved by the Peace Corps in recent years. Unfortunately, at a funding level of \$375 Million, some of these rollbacks have started to take hold.

- **Volunteers in the Field:** Because of the strong bi-partisan support of this subcommittee, the FY 2010 Peace Corps appropriation allowed the number of Peace Corps volunteers and trainees to reach a 40-year high, with more than 9,000 volunteers and trainees in the field. However, volunteers serving under this funding level have now completed their two-year service. Since then, reduced funding has led to a reduction of approximately 1,000 volunteers. Furthermore, impacts of the sequester are projected to reduce numbers by an additional 200 – 300 volunteers. This would result in a nearly 15 percent reduction in volunteers since 2010. At a time of continued high unemployment, these reductions

represent a significant drop in opportunities for citizens to be at work, while attaining highly relevant experiences and skill sets that make our nation stronger.

- **Country Selection:** For years, the Peace Corps has had to turn down requests for volunteers from 20 or more countries due to a lack of resources. In the recent past, there was some progress in reducing this backlog of requests with Peace Corps' return to Indonesia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Colombia, Nepal and Tunisia. However, that progress has once again stalled and may be regressing. It is highly unfortunate that far too many countries requesting volunteers continue to see those requests go unfulfilled. Without a re-investment, it is likely the backlog of requests for volunteers from interested countries will not decrease and could potentially rise.
- **Health, Safety and Security:** In expressing its support for the Peace Corps, Congress regularly emphasizes 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. Since the passage of the Kate Puzey Peace Corps Volunteer Protection Act the agency has begun to implement key improvements as overall funding is in decline. The first annual report (November 2012) of the Peace Corps Volunteer Sexual Assault Advisory Council outlines nearly 50 additional recommendations for continued progress in supporting victims of sexual assault. While there are no major capital or new staff costs included in the recommendations, they contain many calls for improvements to various training materials and training opportunities, enhanced resources for the Peace Corps Medical Office, the creation of appropriate response protocols for all sexual assault cases (not just rape and major offenses) and more. 2012 also saw the release of a Government Accountability Office report on the working relationship between Peace Corps and the Labor Department regarding access to and quality of health care benefits. The report notes that total reimbursements in 2011 for volunteers for both health care and other benefits totaled about \$12 Million, that these expenses were on the rise, and that improvements are needed to better monitor the access to and quality of Federal Employees' Compensation Act (FECA) benefits for volunteers who suffer from service-related injuries or illness. We need to continue progress on these fronts, while not sacrificing Peace Corps training, programming and placement.
- **Resignation Rates:** Peace Corps is reporting significant drops in the number of volunteers who decide they no longer wish to continue their service. The percentage of resignation rates has dropped nearly 30 percent (7.3 percent to 5.3 percent) over the last four years. While many factors contribute to the resignation rate, a key factor relates to the level of satisfaction volunteers have with their work assignments, training, community placement and sense of accomplishment. Providing sustainable resources for these elements of Peace Corps programming are an important part of the effort to keep volunteer resignations low.
- **Volunteer Diversity:** The Peace Corps has been able to maintain record high diversity among its volunteers, where 20 percent is becoming the new standard in volunteer recruitment. Some of the strategies to advance this goal were



highlighted in the June, 2010 agency assessment, which noted in part, “To be effective at schools that have not traditionally produced many Volunteers - including many Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges – recruiters will need to do more than visit the school once or twice a year. Recruiters have to spend a significant amount of time cultivating relationships with administration and faculty, explain what the Peace Corps is and what it does, and demonstrate that the agency is an involved partner.” Sustaining such a recommendation will be significantly challenged should the agency be faced with reductions in funding slated for volunteer recruitment and placement. And, while the overall percentage of minority volunteers may remain stable, current and projected cuts in the number of Peace Corps Volunteers could mean as much as a 17 percent drop in the number of minority volunteers.

In addition to the concerns outlined above, there are a number of other reasons why returning Peace Corps funding to Fiscal Year 2010 levels are warranted:

- **International Leadership:** Last year’s tragic death of U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens reminds us of the importance of the Peace Corps. Ambassador Stevens’ pathway to his extraordinary service to our nation began with his service as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Morocco. Our Foreign Service institutions and non-governmental organizations that provide critical humanitarian and development assistance around the world are replete with similar individuals whose careers began with Peace Corps service.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** From malaria prevention to AIDS relief to adequate and clean supplies of water, the Peace Corps continues to engage other government agencies and the private sector to form collaborative partnerships that result in meaningful grassroots development for the world’s most impoverished people. For example, volunteers continue to be active contributors to the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which provided vital support to tens of millions of individuals in 2012. 2012 also marked a new public-private partnership between the Peace Corps, USAID and the Coca-Cola Corporation to improve the capacity of local communities to have clean water. The creativity and innovation demonstrated by these collaborations should be rewarded.
- **Domestic Benefits:** Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) are leaders in our communities. The nearly 150 member groups of the National Peace Corps Association act as private fundraising and service organizations, which over the years provide tens of thousands of hours of community service and hundreds of thousands of dollars in financial contributions to address key domestic and international needs. All told, RPCVs provided tens of millions of hours of volunteer service in 2012.
- **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 addressing the interconnected nature of our world, President Obama said this in his 2013 State of the Union address:

*"We also know that progress in the most impoverished parts of our world enriches us all, not only because it creates new markets, more stable order in certain regions of the world, but also because it's the right thing to do...the United States will join with our allies to eradicate such extreme poverty in the next two decades, by connecting more people to the global economy, by empowering women, **by giving our young and brightest minds new opportunities to serve** and helping communities to feed and power and educate themselves, by saving the world's children from preventable deaths, and by realizing the promise of an AIDS-free generation, which is within our reach."* (emphasis added)

This statement personifies the mission and the spirit of the Peace Corps, our nation's most iconic and beloved international assistance program that has helped bring the U.S. ideals of peace and friendship to 169 countries over the past 52 years. Let us honor this program by providing resources that honor Peace Corps' past, rewards its present, and believes in its future.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Glenn Blumhorst". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Glenn" and last name "Blumhorst" clearly distinguishable.

Glenn Blumhorst  
President  
National Peace Corps Association