

United States Senate

May 7, 2021

Ms. Carol Spahn
Acting Director
The Peace Corps
1275 First Street NE
Washington, D.C. 20526

Dear Acting Director Spahn:

The Peace Corps has an honorable mission to promote freedom and world peace, and spread American ideals to developing nations around the world. However, I was disturbed to learn of recent reports by USA Today¹ that the Peace Corps is failing to manage the threat of sexual assault against its volunteers, and at times placing them in dangerous situations.

The safety and wellbeing of the Peace Corps' 7,000 volunteers and trainees around the world must always be your top priority. Last Congress, I sponsored the Peace Corps Mission Accountability Act to prohibit all Peace Corps activity in hostile countries, like Communist China. I was pleased the Peace Corps finally agreed to leave Communist China early last year. The Peace Corps should never put volunteers in dangerous positions, and American taxpayers should never be asked to fund missions that send volunteers and resources to hostile nations.

These reports of sexual assault, and lack of appropriate action by the Peace Corps to protect its members and prevent these incidents, are shocking and unacceptable. I understand the agency made significant reforms in your risk reduction response over the last decade and that the Office of Inspector General has been asked to review the specific cases referred to in the USA Today report². However, to protect the health and safety of all Peace Corps volunteers and trainees, especially as volunteers return to service after the COVID-19 pandemic, I ask that you provide answers to the following questions:

¹ <https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/investigations/2021/04/22/sexual-assault-peace-corps-volunteers-betrayed-violated/6804425002/>

² <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/20685768-peace-corps-statement-to-usa-today>

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1. How does the Peace Corps ensure that every sexual assault report is quickly reviewed and that any appropriate actions are urgently completed? Please outline the process for reporting and responding to incidents of sexual assault and violence against volunteers. Who at the Peace Corps is involved in the investigation and resolution of these cases?
2. Was the Peace Corps aware of the incidents outlined in the USA Today report – or was the public reporting the first time anyone at the agency learned of these cases?
3. I understand that the Peace Corps made changes to its risk reduction response, starting in 2010. What triggered those changes? What was occurring prior to 2010? Does the USA Today report necessitate another review of the agency's risk reduction response?
4. Were appropriate processes followed by agency personnel and volunteers with regard to the reports described by USA Today?
5. Have any additional changes been made in response to the USA Today report?
6. What do you say to the accusation that Peace Corps staff ignored known threats?
7. What countries have you deemed too dangerous for Peace Corps activities to continue? Are there any additional countries where you are considering ending Peace Corps missions?
8. What is the decision-making process for the Peace Corps when it believes it can no longer safely send volunteers to a certain country?

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter and for prioritizing the health and safety of Peace Corps volunteers. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Rick Scott
United States Senator