

Remarks
Ambassador D. Brent Hardt
Peace Corps GUY 24 Swearing In Ceremony
March 29, 2012, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Theater Guild Playhouse

Distinguished guests from:

the Ministry of Health;

the Ministry of Education;

Members of the media;

Peace Corps Volunteers,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here today. Thank you, Brannon, for inviting me to address and swear in this new group of volunteers. It is an honor and a privilege I have long anticipated and will long remember. I have always admired the Peace Corps and especially those who volunteer for this “hardest job you will ever love” as representing the very best of the United States: the strong sense of volunteerism that marks our nation, our openness to other people and cultures, and the strong spirit of adventure that led us to explore a vast continent. I salute all the new

volunteers here today for continuing this finest of American traditions. Thank you for your willingness to serve and to represent our country here in Guyana.

As most of our volunteers have already discovered, Guyana is a country for nature lovers and adventure seekers. It has an irresistible combination of fascinating and breathtaking natural beauty, including pristine Amazon rainforests, incredible waterfalls, and amazing wildlife, that is joined to a vibrant culture, a diverse and rich heritage, and some of the most hospitable and friendly people in the world.

Despite its intense beauty and tremendous potential, Guyana is also a developing country, and, as such, faces considerable challenges, including poverty, an HIV/AIDS epidemic, stubborn ethnic and racial divisions, crime and security threats, and education gaps. The United States has a strong interest in working in partnership with Guyana to support national efforts to meet these challenges and fulfill this potential.

The United States Government is working hard to forge a closer and more productive partnership with the Government and people of Guyana to help build a more prosperous, secure, democratic, and healthy Guyana. Our talented and hard-working personnel at the U.S. Embassy seek to achieve this through active diplomatic engagement, targeted development assistance, and an active two-way flow of people, ideas, and information. Our Embassy will continue to work with the Government and people of Guyana to solidify the gains in democratic governance, bolster economic growth, and promote opportunity, particularly for young people and women.

Achieving international peace and promoting international understanding are among the core goals of United States' engagement throughout the world and are priorities that President Obama has pursued with energy and determination. The goals of Peace Corps align closely with President Obama's vision for increased international peace and understanding. Although times have changed, the Peace Corps has adhered to the unchanged goals of its founding:

- helping the people of partner countries to meet their need for trained men and women;
- helping promote a better understanding of our country and our people within the host country;
- and helping promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

Peace Corps Volunteers continue to work with host organizations and other partners to support countless individuals who want to build a better life for themselves, their children, and their communities.

The Peace Corps emerged from of the optimism, energy, and idealism surrounding the presidential candidacy of John F. Kennedy in 1960. A Senator at the time, Kennedy issued a challenge to students at the University of Michigan to serve their country by living and working in the developing world. This challenge was later embodied in President Kennedy's inaugural call for Americans to "ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country." The Peace Corps became the living embodiment of this spirit of service, and

perhaps one of President Kennedy's greatest legacies that has touched lives of people worldwide, built lasting bonds of friendship across cultural and political boundaries, and launched hundreds of thousands of volunteers onward to fulfilling lives of dedicated service. Last year, the United States Peace Corps celebrated fifty years of service. Over its fifty-one year history, the Peace Corps has accepted invitations to work in 139 countries, and there are now several generations who have worked in every corner of the world in pursuit of friendship and peace.

The Peace Corps was first welcomed to Guyana in 1966, serving the development interests of the country until 1971. Returning in 1995, the Peace Corps was invited to work as community-based promoters in the health and education sectors. With this new group of Trainees being sworn in today, a total of 575 Volunteers will have served in Guyana.

Peace Corps Volunteers currently serve in nine of the 10 administrative regions, providing priority attention to communities with the greatest development challenges and fewest resources to meet them.

Our talented, adventurous, and public spirited volunteers come to Guyana from all fifty U.S. states and truly represent the ethnic, cultural, religious, and social diversity of the United States. They bring a variety of skills and life experiences to enrich their service in Guyana – some, including our most senior volunteer, who brings 69 years of insight and wisdom, with many years of experience, and some fresh out of university with the insights gleaned from professors and college classmates.

Having known many Peace Corps volunteers over the years, including my sister who served in what was then known as Upper Volta and became Burkina Faso in the early 1980's, and my two best friends from college, who served in Thailand and Swaziland, I have always had great admiration for the extraordinary commitment and compassion that Peace Corps volunteers bring to supporting others and to building stronger communities by increasing human capacity to address development challenges. I have seen this passion likewise in volunteers

I met in the Eastern Caribbean countries during my previous posting in Barbados, and now in Guyana. What is most gratifying to observe are the synergies and friendships that develop between the volunteers and their dedicated local counterparts, supervisors, and community leaders, who together are able to help each other achieve their goals and vision for a brighter future for people worldwide. Today's inductees – "GUY 24" – represent the next link in an unbroken chain of American citizens who proudly serve their country by building and strengthening communities among our Guyanese friends abroad.

All of this would not be possible without a very hard-working and talented Peace Corps Guyana staff, and I would like to take this opportunity to recognize these critical members of our Embassy team for their excellence and dedication to our Peace Corps program. Peace Corps Country Director Brannon Brewer has been a tireless advocate for the volunteers and their work since his arrival in 2010. He has boosted the success of volunteers and the effectiveness of our programs greatly. We also owe a great debt of gratitude to the many host families who are

here today. By welcoming our trainees into your families during these past weeks, you have opened the door to your wonderful culture and taught our volunteers how to be Guyanese. Thank you for your generous hospitality and support for our volunteers.

Last of all, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health for their continued close collaboration with us to ensure that our Peace Corps programs are tailored to the needs of communities and people in Guyana. *[Minister Manickchand / or other MOE REP]*, we thank you for your support to the Peace Corps Education project, which has made it possible for our volunteers to assist the Ministry in enhancing and strengthening the capacity of teachers and schools to address critical educational needs in literacy, numeracy, healthy lifestyles, and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). *[Minister Ramsaran / or other MOH Rep]*, we are also grateful to the Ministry of Health for its guidance and support for our efforts to strengthen primary health care programs through the transfer of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and best

practices to communities. Volunteers work alongside locally trained community health workers to provide much needed basic health education in rural and urban communities. They also assist in linking community-based concerns with the regional health offices and other organizations providing public health services. Together, we have been able to promote health and wellness and reduce the incidence of HIV/AIDS and other STIs, combat infant and maternal mortality, and reduce individual and family vulnerability to chronic and communicable diseases.

To the 32 GUY 24 Trainees – I commend you for embarking on what will surely be one of the most challenging and rewarding assignments of your lives. Brannon has assured me you are all up to the task and ready to serve. I know you have already embraced this country and begun to feel a deep connection to the urgency and value of the work ahead of you. I am confident you will make significant contributions to the lives of your students, to your schools, to your

colleagues, and to the communities in which you will be living and working.

Above all else, I believe you will come away from this experience a changed and enriched person – even more compassionate, brilliant, and innovative than you are now if that is possible. I have found as a diplomat that living and working in a foreign country will deepen your appreciation and understanding of the United States – both its strengths and shortcomings. These insights will allow you to approach whatever your future has to offer you in a new way, with a broader perspective about how you can contribute to your profession, your community, our country, and the global community. Who knows, your experience may inspire you to pursue a career that allows you to continue to connect and bridge gaps between people all over the world.

Many of your predecessors have found their Peace Corps experience provided a strong foundation for careers in non-governmental organizations and in the Foreign Service, both with the

Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development. A few of them are here today – including USAID’s Acting Director Bill Gelman, who began his overseas career as a Peace Corps Volunteer. Kevin McLaughlin was also a Peace Corps Volunteer and is currently a contractor for USAID; we also have Lorine Ghabranious a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer from GUY 20, who is now the Country Representative for World Teach; and lastly Sheryl Morgan, also a Guyana Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, who serves as the Chief of Party for Catholic Relief Services. These individuals look back with fondness, respect, and understanding for the people with whom they have worked. They dedicated themselves to changing the world for the better one person at a time. I encourage you to reach out to them and take advantage of their leadership and experience.

While I may serve as the U.S. Ambassador to Guyana, I hope that you also recognize that you will all be ambassadors for our nation in your communities. I know you will represent our nation with distinction and earn the respect and goodwill of the people you meet. And when

you return to the United States in two years, I trust that you will spread the word about the beauty of this country and its people to your friends and family, and promote the spirit of understanding that President Kennedy knew such exchanges would create among Americans, our friends in Guyana, and elsewhere in the world.

For all of your efforts so far, and all that you will achieve in the next two years, on behalf of the U. S. Government, I thank you. I wish you the very best as you begin your service today as a United States Peace Corps Volunteer. Make us proud and have fun. Welcome to Guyana.

I will now administer the Oath to swear you in as Peace Corps Volunteers, official members of GUY 24. Please stand and raise your right hand.

I (state your name) DO SOLEMNLY SWEAR

**THAT I WILL SUPPORT AND DEFEND THE
CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES**

AGAINST ALL ENEMIES FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC

**THAT I WILL BEAR TRUE FAITH AND ALLEGIANCE
TO THE SAME**

THAT I TAKE THIS OBLIGATION FREELY

**WITHOUT ANY MENTAL RESERVATION OR
PURPOSE OF EVASION**

AND THAT I WILL WELL AND FAITHFULLY

DISCHARGE MY DUTIES IN THE PEACE CORPS

SO HELP ME GOD.