



**UNITED STATES EMBASSY
FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE**



PEACE CORPS SWEARING IN REMARKS

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Invited guests, honorable officials, host families, Peace Corps Staff, and Volunteers -- Thank you for inviting me to address and swear in this new group of Volunteers. It is an honor and a privilege that I will remember for the rest of my life.

The United States Peace Corps has a long and proud history in Sierra Leone. The program began in 1962, and from 1962 to 1994 more than 3,400 Volunteers served in Sierra Leone. In the first ten years Volunteers worked only in the field of education; the program then expanded to include health, agriculture, and other areas.

The United States and Sierra Leone signed a Country Agreement in November 2009 that paved the way for the return of Volunteers. A Memorandum of Understanding was subsequently signed with the Ministry of Education in June 2010. The Government requested that Volunteers first be assigned in the field of education, at the Junior and Senior secondary school levels, in order to address critical needs for teachers of math, science and English.

Before us here today is the first group of new Volunteers, who arrived in Sierra Leone on June 4. They have been greeted warmly, and with the hospitality they have since come to know so well, through the kindness and generosity of their host families. Their arrival was featured on national television, and they were able to pay a courtesy call on the President at State House.

Many former Peace Corps Volunteers who served in Sierra Leone maintain their connection after service through continued support of their schools, and communities, because of the warm relationships they have developed during their two years of service.

The first Ambassador I served under, Roger Meece, was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Sierra Leone, and he fondly spoke of his experience. Now in retirement, he is waiting for me to write him about my impressions and experience here.

As many of the more than 200,000 Americans who have served with the Peace Corps since its founding in 1961, I also have kept in touch with some of those who I came to know when I served as a Peace

Corps Volunteer in Belize, in Central America, from 1981 to 1983. I arrived in Belize with an assignment to teach at a youth development center, but I soon found there was an even greater need for someone with my skills and education at the National Teachers' College, where I ended up teaching for three semesters. I taught education courses to first and second year students, and supervised 15 third-year students, all primary school teachers, who were completing a year of supervised teaching before graduating and returning to teach full time.

You will know soon, if not already, that the three goals of Peace Corps are to impart technical skills or knowledge, to help the people of other countries learn more about the United States, and to help the people of the United States learn more about other countries and peoples. I believe there are two common threads that run through these goals: one is learning, and growing, in knowledge and skills, about things and about people, and the other is the importance of relationships.

You cannot impart skills, you cannot share knowledge, and you cannot help people without first building relationships, strong, positive, and hopefully enduring relationships. This is a people business. After I was a Volunteer I worked for a year as a Recruiter, and I used to talk about the Peace Corps as an entrepreneurial enterprise. What I mean by entrepreneurship is the ability to identify a need, and to organize yourself and others to address that need.

You may think you are here to teach math or science to secondary school students. Indeed, you may spend most of your time doing that, and loving it, and that will be your success. But, you may also find that you identify some other project or service, to which you end up devoting your time, your passion, and your energy...and that will be your success. Build relationships and be an entrepreneur!

I learned a lot as a Peace Corps Volunteer, but mostly I learned about myself. I learned I loved teaching, and I was very good at it, and I learned that I really wanted to work and live overseas. I decided to pursue graduate study in international affairs, where I met my wife Jean. I worked at the African Development Bank, for USAID promoting democracy and governance in Eastern Europe, and the Former Soviet Union, and I joined the State Department as a Foreign Service Officer, serving in both Europe and Africa.

As you start out today, your first as Peace Corps Volunteers, look around you, and take pleasure in the knowledge that 10, 20, or even 40 years from now, some of these new friends, and families, will be old friends and families...and you may be up here in 30 years, like me, doing a swearing in, that 30 years ago I would never have dreamed I would have the opportunity to do.

Let me leave you with one final thought. For many Sierra Leoneans, you are the only American they are likely to meet. You are, in essence, the "face of America." I'm confident you will represent the best that America has to offer. I'm confident you will make significant contributions to the lives of your students, to your schools, and to the communities in which you will be living and working.

Above all else, I am confident you will come away from this experience a changed person, and you will be an agent of cross-cultural understanding upon your return to America.

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 today your service as a United States Peace Corps Volunteer.

Thank you.