

From: "Glenn Blumhorst, NPCA President & CEO"
Subject: When Our Peace Corps Values Matter Most
Date: December 23, 2015 at 8:57:11 AM PST
To:
Reply-To: development@peacecorpsconnect.org

Dear Alan,

Like many of you, I am deeply disturbed by the recent chorus of negative and aggressive speech targeting Muslims and refugees in our country. At times it has seemed impossible to pass even a single day without encountering prejudicial, uninformed, and inflammatory messages in the press and on social media.

Over the course of 54 years, more than 220,000 of us have lived and worked side by side, often in isolated, marginalized communities, with the citizens of 141 countries. Among those that have invited us and welcomed us are predominantly Muslim countries – places like Morocco, Turkey, Jordan, Iran, Azerbaijan, Yemen, Indonesia, and Senegal – and our Latin American neighbors like Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Bolivia.

Together with our hosts we celebrated, worshipped, and grieved. We broke bread and learned each other's languages. We immersed ourselves in our shared humanity. Because as Peace Corps Volunteers we are tasked not merely with transferring skills and knowledge, but also with sharing, in a spirit of humility and respect, what it means to be an American.

The hateful messages we have been hearing do not reflect who we are as a country. They make our fellow citizens feel

unsafe, and those here fleeing violence unwelcome. And they threaten to damage the reservoirs of good will abroad that Peace Corps Volunteers have painstakingly built over decades. They are wrong and we condemn them.

As Volunteers, we promised to take on a third task: to foster among Americans a greater understanding of the places where we served.

Now is the time for us to rededicate ourselves to this third goal of the Peace Corps, to commit ourselves to education and constructive dialogue – to the open hand of America, rather than the closed fist.

Together, I urge us all to:

- **Reach out, in large ways and small, to Muslims, refugees and other minorities in our communities.**

Welcome them as we were welcomed when we were Volunteers far from home.

- **Call out hate speech.** Counter stereotypes and prejudice – at work, in our homes, in public, with friends.

- **Share your Peace Corps story in person.** Seek opportunities to speak at libraries, schools, places of worship, civic and social organizations. Share what it was like to serve in a Muslim country, in a minority community, or simply to be a newcomer in a strange land.

- **Share your Peace Corps experience even more widely.** Write letters to the editor and op-ed articles. Use social media to showcase messages and images of tolerance and respect using the hashtag #PCisPeace. [Write to politicians and your Congressional delegation](#). Let people know that prejudicial speech undermines the mission of the Peace Corps and the values of our nation.

- **Connect with your fellow Peace Corps Volunteers.** Reach for encouragement and support when you feel frustrated or discouraged. Many of our affiliate groups have established community outreach efforts, or are

mobilizing to respond to this newly hostile climate. The National Peace Corps Association will in turn share information and support awareness-raising efforts by our community.

Friendship. Freedom. Openness. Respect. These are American values to which we dedicated 27 months of our lives, and these are the values that continue to animate everything we do, both professionally and personally, as Returned – not former, not “ex” – **Peace** Corps Volunteers.

In continued service,

Glenn Blumhorst
President & CEO
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