

Peace Corps Event
September 15, 1998
DC

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PRESERVATION

First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
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I feel absolutely inspired and energized by Sargent's speech and his orders to go out and make peace. I feel with that offer I just might leave this afternoon. Just point me in the right direction. Of course it would have to be an English speaking country at least initially. It is such a pleasure for me to be here, because every time I am with anyone associated with the Peace Corps, I am energized. Looking at all of you I know why: because there is a Peace Corps spirit embodied both by former volunteers and those who are about to start their service.

I am grateful to all of you, who, along with Sargent Shriver and this hearty band whose names will be on this wall, make the Peace Corps possible. I am grateful to all of you who as volunteers and Peace Corps staff members of the past and present have continued that spirit and have enabled all of us to take great pride and joy in what the Peace Corps stands for and the work it does.

We are so blessed today to have members of Congress and so many of you who are experienced either in the Peace Corps or in supporting the Peace Corps; and I am particularly grateful to our two senators who have spoken of their commitment. Donna Shalala, who is, as you may have guessed, one of the most dedicated people in any regard you will ever meet, has carried her Peace Corps spirit and experience with her as she told us today.

I am delighted that many members of the Shriver family could be here with us today because I think anyone who knows the Shrivens knows what a commitment they have to service on behalf of humanity. I am very grateful for their example. I also want to thank the director and deputy director for their leadership. And Mark Gearan, I think your tireless efforts to make today a reality is remarkable.

It is a particular pleasure for me to be here with my dear friend, Her Majesty Queen Noor. I count her friendship as one of my greatest joys during my service here in Washington, as well as the work that my husband and I have done and the friendship we have developed with, both, the King and Queen of Jordan. They are among two of the finest people you will find anywhere in the world. They have been both leaders and very strong friends.

I was honored to meet the first contingent of Peace Corps volunteers as they departed for their service in Jordan, and I hope that they will have a chance to meet Her Majesty. I should just assume that they will, given her interest, her involvement and activity throughout Jordan. I was delighted to hear the reports of what she is doing and what our volunteers are doing with her.

We are here not only to honor the past, as we have heard so eloquently described, but to imagine the future that this building and the Peace Corps of today represents. We know that there is a lot of work for volunteers to do, not only abroad where they serve, but also in bringing the message of what they have learned and seen abroad home to America. We hope that this new building,

including the Visitor's Center, will make it possible for young people, and not so young people, to learn more about the Peace Corps experience and what it represents -- in building peace as Sarge said and in taking to the rest of the world our ideas and values about how we can live cooperatively and peacefully together.

This building will certainly serve the Peace Corps well into the future. I was delighted that when I came in for the ribbon cutting we had with us some seventh graders from Washington's Barnett-Patterson Middle School, and I would like them to stand now.

They are the first school group to tour this new building, and that is in large part thanks to their teacher, Jo Benet who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Togo.

She is working already to instill in her students a spirit of service and understanding of other cultures. I imagine that many of you who have served, and the volunteers departing for Malawi tomorrow will be thinking of ways to do that as well. One of the tangible ways that is going to happen is that the seventh graders I have just introduced will be corresponding with Peace Corps volunteers in Malawi as part of the World Wide School Program, which connects American students with Peace Corps volunteers around the world.

I am so pleased to hear that because one of my hopes is that more young Americans can see the world as the Peace Corps volunteers see it -- through their eyes. One of the best ways we can do that is to connect our young people with volunteers who are serving and who have served, because we know that if we did not have better communication, we could not do what we are doing. Better communication means nothing if we do not share stories and learn from each other around the world today. I am delighted by this program.

Well clearly we are here also to honor Sarge Shriver; the architect of the Peace Corps, the organizer of the agency, who showed us what it really is to be a Peace Corps volunteer.

There is a story, Sarge, which I am going to assume is true and I don't want you to contradict me. The story is that when you and your compatriots were organizing the Peace Corps in 1961, you were shown an organizational chart. The chart was a typical Washington organizational chart -- you know, all the people who were doing the work were down at the bottom, leading up to the one person on top who gets to go around and take a lot of credit.

Well, those lines showing who reported to whom and how it all fit together did not sit well with Sarge. Because at the bottom of the chart was the word "volunteer." So, Sarge immediately turned it upside-down so the word volunteer appeared at the top, and that was where it should have been to begin with and that is where it has remained ever since.

It is the volunteers who make the Peace Corps what it is; it is the volunteers who take this message of what we are trying to convey to the rest of the world to their various places of service. Certainly Sarge's unswerving commitment to the ideal of service is one of the reasons why my husband awarded him the Medal of Freedom, our country's highest civilian honor. Well today we honor him again, in a way that I know he finds equally exciting as we just heard, by

naming this hall in his honor.

I hope that there will be many meetings, and convenings and gatherings in this hall. Where people will come together to cross the lines that we too often let divide us to learn from each other, to think about the contributions of other cultures, to plot the ways toward peace that Sarge has asked us to do.

I am also pleased that the Peace Corps served as the inspiration for my husband to create the Corporation for National Service. It is no accident that Harris Wofford who was one of those compatriots of Sarge Shriver heads up the Corporation for National Service which gives young Americans, and not so young Americans, a chance also to bring the ideals and the example of the Peace Corps home to America to serve in communities throughout our nation, helping those less fortunate to help themselves.

The Peace Corps has spawned so much in the years that it has been part of our national life. I think its best years may be ahead of it because it is in the future that we have to work even harder to make our own people and the people around the world awaken to our interconnectedness, and to how much of a stake we have in working with each other to build that peaceful, purposeful, secure future that Sarge talked about.

Over the past six years I have been privileged to see the great difference that Peace Corps volunteers are making, in South Asia, South America, Central Asia, and Africa. Throughout the world I have been meeting with Peace Corps volunteers. And I have to tell you, those of you who know Peace Corps volunteers know how shy and retiring they are. I can hear Peace Corps volunteers from miles away as I approach wherever I am going to be meeting them. At any large gathering, there may be a gathering of thousands of people, but the people making the most noise are the Peace Corps volunteers.

Their enthusiasm never flags. Do not ever let it flag. I have now seen it on nearly every continent. It always gives me a lift. It makes me so proud and happy to be with all of you. What we want to do now, what the President has put in his budget, is to launch a new national recruitment drive, aimed at meeting the goal of 10,000 volunteers serving by the year 2000.

I really hope we meet that goal next. I love the new recruitment theme, "How Far Are You Willing to Go To Make A Difference?" I know how far some of our volunteers have gone to make a difference. I know how far some of them have traveled just to see me. When I was in Kathmandu, they were actually comparing how difficult the task was of getting themselves from their remote villages in the Himalayas into Kathmandu. One girl won after she absolutely swore she walked for ten hours and then was on a bus for two days. The thing she was proudest of is that she had to be MediVac-ed out.

I have to tell you as a mother my heart sank when I began hearing the stories about how far they had gone before they had been MediVac-ed out. Please, take care of your health so that you can continue to serve now and as returning volunteers can continue to contribute to our country.

This work that you are doing is something to which the President and I are fully committed. We know how essential it is as a part of the overall strategy that our country must have as we work with people of good faith to build that peaceful and secure future. The Peace Corps has already made a very tangible and real contribution to making clear that America is seen as we would like to be seen around the world -- as people who want to bring tools and opportunities to those who can then build a better life for themselves.

I would hope that those of you who are committed to the Peace Corps will take on one more task, because we need to do a better job of persuading our fellow Americans to be more involved and engaged in the world today. There is no major crisis that threatens our country. There are many trouble spots, and in many ways this is a more difficult and dangerous world than in the bi-polar days of the Soviet threat. That is one of the principle reasons why we need the Peace Corps even more, and why we need the Peace Corps spirit to infect every American with the idea that we are interconnected with, and we have a stake in, the success and prosperity of people throughout our world.

If we can believe that and act on it, then the fondest dreams, so eloquently expressed by Sarge today about what the Peace Corps really means, will have a chance to come true in the next century. For that I thank all of you who have kept that dream and spirit alive.

Thank you very much.