



## **Peace Corps Statement Issued to ABC News' 20/20**

*January 11, 2011* -- During the production of your story and the interview with Deputy Director Carrie Hessler-Radelet, the Peace Corps has made it clear that, in the interest of justice for Kate Puzey and her family, we will not comment on the ongoing investigation into the murder of Kate Puzey or do anything else that could risk compromising that investigation or any prosecution of the case.

It is understandable that the Puzey family wants more information about what happened to their daughter. Kate's family has our deepest sympathies for their tragic loss, and the Peace Corps is united with the Puzey family in the pursuit of justice for Kate. We have also put into place new protocols that respond to the concerns expressed by the Puzey family on how the agency supports the families of fallen volunteers. Peace Corps does not have a role in the ongoing investigation, but we have been assured that the Benin government is supporting the legal process necessary to conclude the investigation and begin a trial. The Department of State and the FBI have been working with the Benin authorities.

Peace Corps manages a comprehensive approach to volunteer safety and security. We always are working to improve and strengthen our training and operations for our staff and volunteers abroad. We will never be able to entirely eliminate volunteers' exposure to crimes overseas, but we will continue to do our best to make Peace Corps a safe and productive experience for the Americans serving as volunteers today and in the future.

A second component to your story covers the concerns of Peace Corps volunteers who have been raped or sexually assaulted while serving abroad. When anything happens to one of our volunteers, we do our best to offer comprehensive support through medical, counseling, and legal services. We are unwavering in our efforts to strengthen our approach to volunteer safety and security.

Since August 2009, when Aaron Williams became Director of the Peace Corps, the agency has put into place measures to improve our security and support operations. The Peace Corps has developed an enhanced agency-wide sexual assault prevention and response strategy. This plan is designed to expand the depth and breadth of the agency's ability and commitment to prevent and respond to sexual assaults. Accordingly, we have undertaken a comprehensive study of best practices in the field of sexual assault prevention, met with leaders in the field of rape prevention and response, written new guidelines for responding to rapes and major sexual assaults for use by overseas staff, developed a statement of Peace Corps' commitment to victims of sexual assault, and updated the agency's incident reporting system.

Although we have made significant progress in strengthening our security and support operations, we know that more needs to be done. We are committed to implementing additional reforms this year and in the future to improve all aspects of volunteer service. As we proceed, we will keep listening to our volunteers and returned volunteers. In addition, we will continue to seek advice and counsel from outside experts and other government agencies on how to improve our security and support systems.

Peace Corps is proud that the vast majority of volunteers feel safe in the areas where they live and work. According to the 2010 Annual Volunteer Survey, 87 percent of our volunteers reported that they were usually safe or very safe where they live and 91 percent reported the same where they work.

Peace Corps remains firmly committed to the safety and security of our volunteers. It is our top priority. If ABC News' 20/20 needs more information on our global operations as you edit your piece, we are available to provide additional data and information to ensure that your program is fair and accurate.