

Statement for the Record
Carol A. Spahn
Nominee for Peace Corps Director
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
November 30, 2022
2:30 p.m.

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished Members of the Committee:

I am honored to appear today as President Biden's nominee to serve as Director of the Peace Corps during this unique moment in our agency's history.

My journey here would not be possible without my family. I want to thank my husband, Andy; my daughters, Emily and Casey; my parents, Ralph and Janet; and my entire extended family for their unwavering love and support.

I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity I had to serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer with my husband in Romania shortly after the fall of communism. As is true for many Volunteers, Peace Corps service challenged my perceptions, expanded my worldview, and fundamentally transformed my life. Living and working alongside Romanians during their pivotal transition to democracy gave me a deep appreciation for the importance of engaging across difference with intention, humility, and respect.

Peace Corps service also altered my career path and led to leadership roles at organizations dedicated to supporting underserved communities around the world. In 2014, I returned to the Peace Corps, first serving as the Country Director in Malawi, then as the Chief of Operations for the Africa Region, and until last week, as the Chief Executive Officer.

My journey is not unique. We see time and again that Peace Corps service extends well beyond a two-year commitment. It fosters a lifetime of global connection and national service. There are thousands of returned Peace Corps Volunteers continuing to serve right here at home – in the foreign and civil service, non-profit, healthcare, education, and many more fields. The skills developed in the Peace Corps enable returned Volunteers to contribute to America long after service overseas concludes.

And, the presence of Volunteers in the farthest reaches of countries, speaking local languages, and honoring local cultures has an impact that goes far beyond the individual contributions of any one Volunteer. Foreign Ambassadors tell me what a powerful signal of friendship it is to see Americans in rural communities, working in close partnership with host country citizens, and American Ambassadors regularly attest that the Peace Corps is the most cost-effective, grassroots diplomacy the United States has.

The Peace Corps' mission of promoting world peace and friendship is critical as we recover from the devastating effects of COVID-19. The pandemic has fundamentally changed our world and set back development progress. Its impact has been compounded by climate change, political and social division, and the global food crisis. At the same time, the pandemic has shown us how deeply connected we are. Demand for the Peace Corps remains strong, both from the countries we evacuated from in 2020 as well as from a growing list of countries requesting Volunteers.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, if confirmed as Director, my **first priority** is returning Peace Corps Volunteers to service abroad, while maintaining the flexibility necessary to navigate uncertainty and respond effectively to countries' evolving needs. Over the past two years, we have strengthened our systems for Volunteer safety and security, including for sexual assault prevention and response; expanded medical services, including mental health support; bolstered our technology infrastructure; and invested in developing a Volunteer corps and staff that represents the full diversity of America.

Second, if confirmed, I will ensure that the Peace Corps remains a strong partner around the world, retaining the critical components of our approach that drive long-term impact while modernizing and expanding service opportunities for the future. We will share our sixty-one years of expertise in localization and people-centered development and will leverage the robust network of returned Volunteers, staff and host communities to build bridges and catalyze change both here and abroad.

Third, if confirmed, I will prioritize youth engagement. Today, there are 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 10 and 24, the largest generation in history, approximately 90% of whom live in developing countries. This is not a problem to be solved; it is an opportunity to be met. Peace Corps Volunteers are uniquely suited to work alongside youth on a range of development goals, from food security and disease prevention to gender equity and economic growth. Together, we will contribute to the development of the next generation of global leaders, a critical investment for a secure, sustainable, and prosperous future.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, thank you for your leadership on the Peace Corps Reauthorization Act. This legislation will make a number of significant changes that will further strengthen the ability of the Peace Corps and its Volunteers to represent America abroad and to bring those skills back to the United States.

Thank you for your support of the Peace Corps, and for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.