

SAFETY AND SECURITY OF PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

STATEMENT BY GLADYS M. MALOY RETURNED PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER ROMANIA (2000-2002)

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Let me begin by thanking you for the opportunity of appearing before you today. My name is Gladys Maloy and I was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Romania from February 2000 until June 2002 so my comments and observations are quite recent and fresh in my memory.

I was born and raised in south Florida and was Mayor of my small town in Palm Beach County for twelve years. I earned a degree in Chemistry and studied accounting and finance. I have three grown children, two attorneys and a PHD. Peace Corps had always been something I thought about doing so when the company at which I was CFO was sold I joined as a senior volunteer. Today I want to talk about the safety and security as I experienced it during my Peace Corps service.

Romania is a country of approximately 23 million people with a communist past that was both destructive to the people as well as the environment. Peace Corps came soon after the December 1989 revolution and I was a member of the 10th group of volunteers in country. Our group was diverse with all ages and backgrounds. Our official jobs included social work, teaching English, business development and environment; however we all taught our colleagues English and were involved in many other projects from hugging babies in the orphanages to encouraging voter participation in elections and policy making.

TRAINING:

The first 12 weeks in Romania were devoted to preparing us to live and work in country. During that time I lived with a Romanian family and met each day (Monday through Saturday) with the other volunteers for eight hours of training in Romanian language, cross-cultural orientation, technical training, and safety and security. My Romanian hosts did not speak English so it was challenging and sometimes frustrating, but always stimulating. This living arrangement was helpful in understanding the country and gave me an in depth look into the life of the ordinary Romanian.

Each training session consisted of four hours of language with the Peace Corps Romanian language teachers. The remaining four hours were training sessions with Peace Corps medical and program staff, national government officials, local security officials, NGO leaders, U.S. officials and others. There were lectures on safety and security issues which included videos, publications on crimes statistics with detailed problems and their solutions. Volunteers already in country came to training sessions, shared their experiences and gave us information on what to expect.

During Saturday sessions we took trips with our language teachers to acquaint us with travel by train, bus and taxi. Since our teachers were Romanian, we received invaluable first-hand knowledge of what to do, where to go and where not to go. We also took a three-day trip with our language teacher to visit volunteers already working with an organization. We meet their counterpart and visited their office and apartment.

Near the end of training our group set up a Safety and Security Committee of volunteers and elected representatives from the major geographic areas of Romania. These representatives worked closely with the Peace Corps medical staff and were available to discuss personal and emotional issues the volunteers were hesitant to discuss with staff. We were fortunate to have three trained physiotherapists in Group 10 who were all members of this committee.

MOVING TO SITE:

Near the end of training I was introduced to my NGO counterpart and traveled with her for a few days to site. My counterpart was a member of the organization I would work with and was responsible for my welfare at work and at home. My counterpart found an apartment and after consulting with Peace Corps medical, she rented it for me. I was given a checklist by Peace Corps medical office to evaluate the apartment for their review. There were detailed evaluation criteria concerning health and safety, such as no apartment could be located on the ground floor unless it had bars on the windows and doors. Peace Corps medical and program staff carefully evaluated the assessments and if there was a problem they went to the site to review it.

Soon after I moved to site the Peace Corps medical staff visited me and reviewed my living conditions. If I had had a problem they would have come sooner. I was asked to supply a list with addresses and phone numbers of my close neighbors and the pharmacies, doctors and hospitals in my area so that they would be on record with Peace Corps in case of an emergency. My counterpart information was already on file but I verified it. Medical also visited me at my one year anniversary.

LIVING AT SITE:

I lived in Galati, a city of 400,000 at the mouth of the Danube River as it flows into the Danube Delta and the Black Sea, and worked in the environmental sector. Other Peace Corps volunteers lived there and worked in different sectors, but we all had separate apartments. Galati has a high Roma population and the major employer is the Sedix steel mill, one of the largest steel mills in Europe. Unemployment is high due to cut backs in steel production for the world market. My counterpart was helpful in introducing me to the city and making sure I was comfortable with my new surroundings.

Peace Corps did not provide cell phones, but I purchased one, as did most other volunteers, and had good reception. The cost of the cell phone was well within my monthly living allowance of \$188 per month. Some of the volunteers in small villages and mountainous regions were unable to use cell phones and relied on internet cafes, which were abundant in most communities, and land line phones either at home or in their office or school. When I returned to Romania for a visit in November 2003, I found that cell phone service was available country wide and that the volunteer living allowance covered the cost.

Site visits by Peace Corps program staff and the country director were frequent. The environmental sector was very active in many projects and the program staff acted as a conduit for passing information. Any time I left my site for another location in Romania (even weekends

and holidays) I had to report my destination to my program director along with all contact information, reason for the travel and dates. When leaving the country I needed prior approval and a request for vacation days had to be filed in advance and approved by my program director and the country director.

The country director did weekly mailings to all volunteers with a Newsweek magazine and letter. The letter, along with other things, contained advisories of potential security risks where volunteers lived and in Bucharest, the capitol city. We also received e-mails to keep us informed before the weekly mailing arrived. A Peace Corps medical and program staff were always available by phone 24 hours.

An Emergency Action Plan was in place and it used a tier system of volunteer contact. Peace Corps contacted the top tiers and they were responsible for contacting the next tier and reporting to Peace Corps and so on. The system was tested often when new groups arrived and at unannounced times. I do not recall the statistics but I do recall that if it was not fast enough it was done again.

SUMMARY:

Judging from my experience as a Peace Corps volunteer the safety and security of the volunteers is a high priority and with the changing world situation they have adapted quickly to meet those demands. One example is in Romania with the formation of a Volunteer Advisory Committee of elected representatives from each sector to screen volunteer issues and present them to the country director at a monthly meeting. I was elected to represent the environment sector and after a shaky start the participation was remarkable. We were able to give our country director an insight into volunteer concerns and problems that he would never have been able to or have the time to address.

Keeping the focus on the volunteers and not letting one issue over shadow all the others is an important function of the Peace Corps. Creating more structured and operational peer support groups, while volunteers are in country as well as addressing effectiveness of safety and security, site selection and counterpart choices would allow for a more robust safety net for volunteers.

My experience in Romania was one of the most rewarding of my life. I feel the Peace Corps did everything possible to insure my safety, but as always anywhere you travel you must take personal responsibility for being aware of the dangers and making every effort to avoid them. I certainly agree and appreciate the Peace Corps safety and security policies of placing volunteers in their community thus enabling them to work closely on a more personal level. Being integrated into the community is of the utmost importance for it allows us as United States citizens to promote all the great values for which our country stands.

I thank you for the opportunity to appear and I hope my brief presentation of my Peace Corps experience has been in some way helpful to your investigation.