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NATIONAL SECURITY AND
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS DIVISION

DECEMBER 19, 1983

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The Honorable Robert W. Edgar
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Edgar:

Subject: Peace Corps Disaster Assistance
Efforts in Jamaica (NSIAD-84-38)

In response to your request of August 20, 1983, we have examined an allegation that the Peace Corps office in Jamaica grossly overrated its achievements in the disaster assistance area when reporting to Washington. The allegation essentially was that the Peace Corps in Jamaica may have either poorly evaluated or inaccurately reported on the effectiveness of its efforts to help the Jamaican Government prepare for possible disasters.

We reviewed the Peace Corps report in question together with a report on disaster preparedness issued by the Government of Jamaica. We also reviewed other related documents at the headquarters offices of the Peace Corps and the Agency for International Development (AID). On the basis of this review and discussions with Peace Corps and AID officials in Washington, it does not appear that the Peace Corps office in Jamaica overrated its efforts to help the Jamaican Government.

BACKGROUND

Historically, Jamaica has experienced natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, and floods. In 1979, two areas of the country were devastated by flooding. As a result of this flooding, AID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and the United Nations Disaster Relief Office both recommended that the Government of Jamaica upgrade the country's emergency management and disaster assistance planning capacity. In 1980, in response to this recommendation, the Jamaican Government established the Office of Disaster Preparedness (ODP) as a government agency within the Prime Minister's Office. ODP is responsible for developing plans to reduce the potential damage from all types of national and local disasters.

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In May 1982, the Peace Corps and AID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance held a regional disaster preparedness conference in Barbados. The conference was attended by Peace Corps and AID staff from Washington and Jamaica and by Government of Jamaica officials. Its purpose was to share disaster-related experiences and explore ways to bring volunteers more actively into host country disaster assistance planning. The conference recommended that volunteers be given training in planning and responding to disasters.

In July 1982, Peace Corps/Jamaica along with ODP and a private contractor began to provide disaster training for Peace Corps volunteers. Also, Peace Corps/Jamaica and the Government of Jamaica began to consider options for using some volunteers in disaster preparedness programs.

In fiscal year 1983, there were 146 Peace Corps volunteers in Jamaica. The volunteers were working in areas such as agriculture, teacher training, vocational rehabilitation, rural community development, forestry, health, and disaster assistance.

QUESTIONED PEACE CORPS REPORT

In March 1983, the Peace Corps Office in Jamaica submitted a report to Washington which summarized disaster assistance activities in Jamaica. This is the report alleged to have grossly overrated disaster assistance achievements. The report provided details on training in disaster preparedness given to volunteers, and it discussed plans for future disaster assistance activities. The report commented that, to a large extent, the training program had been established and would function as an integral part of Peace Corps/Jamaica activities.

The report also stated that recent disaster training activities in Jamaica provided a viable framework for future actions. Such actions are to include assigning three volunteers to assist ODP develop training programs and public information services. The report discussed the potential for using volunteers, on a part-time basis, to assist at the community level in developing disaster preparedness plans and activities.

Since the main thrust of the report appeared to be oriented to future plans, we focused on progress made in implementing those plans since March 1983.

OBSERVATIONS AND CURRENT STATUS

Subsequent events have confirmed that some of the plans discussed in the report have begun to be implemented and others are in process of being implemented. Moreover, the Government

of Jamaica seems to be appreciative of and receptive to efforts thus far by volunteers to assist its national and local governments in developing disaster preparedness and response plans.

In the Spring of 1983, three Peace Corps volunteers were assigned to ODP to work in the disaster assistance area. Two work as training officers and the other functions as an information officer/librarian. One of the training officers is a former official of the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency. An August 1983 status report prepared by ODP recognized the efforts made by two of the volunteers. The ODP report states that a volunteer reviewed Jamaica's emergency relief system and identified numerous issues that need to be resolved. The report further states that since April 1983, a documentation center has been staffed by a trained librarian provided by the Peace Corps. This center reportedly continues to expand its collection of literature, slides, and films. This material is provided to a variety of users for educational purposes in the disaster assistance area.

In addition, the August 1983 ODP status report stated that in the next 12 months a special effort will be made to increase the involvement of voluntary groups in developing parish disaster response plans. According to the report, a pilot program using volunteers to work with parish voluntary agencies was to be organized and begin functioning in September 1983. Subsequently, Peace Corps/Jamaica reported to Washington that 12 volunteers have begun participating in the pilot program.

We have discussed the contents of this letter with Peace Corps officials. As arranged with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this letter until 5 days from its date. At that time we will send copies to the Peace Corps and make copies available to others upon request.

Sincerely yours,



Frank C. Conahan
Director