



## Peace Corps Swearing-In Ceremony

June 10, 2009

Ambassador of the United States to the Kyrgyz Republic

Tatiana C. Gfoeller

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Thank you. It is a real honor and pleasure for me to be here today at such an important moment. I believe this moment is important for two reasons: first, because it's truly wonderful that you are all being sworn in as Volunteers. This is a great honor and a great responsibility. And second, because this week will be remembered in history as the beginning of a new relationship between America and Muslim believers after President Obama's speech in Cairo last Thursday.

I want to say thank you to Country Director Claudia Kuric and the Peace Corps organization for inviting me to speak today. I would like to welcome Col. Isayev, the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, and other guests in attendance.

But most of all I want to say congratulations to the newest Volunteers, the 17<sup>th</sup> group in the Kyrgyz Republic! And congratulations to the Peace Corps staff, trainers and host families for helping them reach this moment with your advice and support. This is a day to celebrate what you all have accomplished in passing the selection process and completing training, but also what lies ahead as Volunteers.

The Peace Corps is truly a remarkable organization that plays a crucial role in American diplomacy, that is, in our relations with the world. As Volunteers, you will be personally bringing American values to the villages of Kyrgyzstan. You will be displaying the spirit of volunteerism that is so strong in American culture. You will be sharing your time and your talents to increase mutual understanding between our nations and to improve Kyrgyzstan.

In doing so, you will become part of a tradition of friendship and cooperation between America and Kyrgyzstan that started with Kyrgyz independence in 1991. In fact, America was one of the first countries in the world to recognize Kyrgyzstan and open an Embassy here. Over the last 18 years, our relationship has included countless exchange programs, USAID assistance, a Millennium Challenge Threshold program, and security cooperation.

At the same time, I strongly believe that you will personally benefit from your time as a Volunteer in Kyrgyzstan. You will leave with many new friends and priceless memories. In

learning the local language and customs, you will be enriching your own life. And you will be doing so in the service of our country and our common world.

This same desire for communication across cultures that you do so well in the Peace Corps is what led President Obama to make a speech to Muslim believers last Thursday. I encourage you to listen to the speech if you have not already, and to share it with your local partners. I think you will find it fascinating, and a real opportunity for further dialogue and action. We are interested in hearing the reaction of the Kyrgyz people, which they can share either through our Embassy website [<http://bishkek.usembassy.gov>] or through the State Department's America.gov website.

President Obama described how he has seen firsthand the dignity and peace that Muslims have found in their faith: coming from a family that includes generations of Muslims, living in Indonesia as a boy, and working with African American Muslims in Chicago. The President acknowledged Muslims' contribution to education, science, medicine, and religious tolerance. He also described how American Muslims, including nearly seven million living in the U.S. today, have enriched the United States.

Finally, President Obama called on everyone to work together through open dialogue and mutual respect to address common interests. These include addressing violent extremism, ensuring that Israelis and Palestinians live together in peace, preventing nuclear proliferation, promoting democracy and human rights, expanding religious freedom, protecting the rights of women, and finally, advancing economic development.

I hope that these themes speak to you as new Volunteers in Central Asia. I believe Kyrgyzstan has the potential to be a true bridge between peoples, in the tradition of the great Silk Road. It has historically been supportive of women's rights, religious freedom, and inter-ethnic harmony. But we hope that Kyrgyzstan can do more, and that the Peace Corps can play a role here. As Volunteers, you will be at the forefront of America's new relationship with the world.

We wish you luck in this endeavor and thank you for your service. Congratulations once more and best wishes.