

Remarks by Deputy Peace Corps Director  
Carrie Hessler- Radelet  
Peace Corps Thailand  
50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration  
July 13, 2012

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- Your Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn
  - Your Excellency Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Jullapong Nonsrichai
  - United States Ambassador to the Kingdom of Thailand Kristine A. Kenney
  - Distinguished Guests
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- I want to begin by expressing my deep appreciation to Your Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn for honoring us with your presence at this celebration of 50 years of Peace Corps service in the Kingdom of Thailand. You have long been a champion for the poor, a distinction which has won you international recognition. It is an honor and a privilege to be a partner with you in this effort, and we thank you, and the Royal Family, for your support for Peace Corps throughout our 50 year history in Thailand.
- I also want to thank Your Excellency Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Jullapong Nonsrichai; the Royal Thai Government; and our Thai partner organizations and co-workers –many of whom are here with us today -- for the incredible support you have provided to Peace Corps Volunteers throughout our shared history. Your strong and enduring commitment to Peace Corps and our Volunteers has made that possible here in Thailand. For the past 50 years, you have welcomed our Volunteers to your country and your community, and made them feel at home. You have supported Peace Corps in the communities in which our Volunteers live and serve, and made it possible for our Volunteers to find meaningful work. You have engaged them as professionals, so that together we can contribute to Thailand's development. Co-workers, in particular, support our Volunteers every single day, and are probably the most important factor in their success as Volunteers. We are so very grateful for your support. Without you, there would be no Peace Corps/Thailand.
- And I want to thank the staff of Peace Corps/Thailand: You were the first Thais our Volunteers met. You welcomed them at the airport, taught them the Thai language, helped them learn about the customs and culture of your beautiful country, and trained them in their technical areas. You nursed them when they were sick, you counseled them when they were sad, you held their hand when they needed it – and you empowered them to be their very best for their adopted country. Without you, our Volunteers would be lost. Our staff are always the foundation of any Peace Corps program, and without you, our program would have failed. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

- And now, lastly, I thank the Volunteers – past and present -- who have served, or continue to serve, in this beautiful country. For many, you were the first (and perhaps only) American they have ever personally known. No matter how long ago you served, I am certain that you are well remembered by those whose lives you've touched in communities across Thailand. In my experience, they still talk about you --the *farong* who lived among them; spoke their language, worked on their community priorities, laughed at their jokes, cried in their pain -- spent time just being with them. You made, and continue to make, a difference.
- On a personal note, I'd like to tell you about my small connection to Thailand. I come from a four generation Peace Corps Family. The first member of my family to serve in Peace Corps was my aunt, Virginia Kirkwood, who later went on to serve as the Peace Corps Country Director here in Thailand from 1989 – 1992. Ginny has a deep and abiding love for Thailand that she has passed onto me. I have visited Thailand numerous times over the past two decades, and with her, I travelled to visit many Peace Corps Volunteers and their communities, including Helen Lowman, our Regional Director for Europe, the Mediterranean and Asia, who I met here in Thailand when she served here as a Volunteer. Helen is here with us today. I share Ginny and Helen's love and affection for this beautiful country and its people.
- So, today we are here to celebrate 50 years of Peace Corps service in Thailand. Many things have changed since those early years, but some have not. In 1961, TIME magazine described the first groups of Peace Corps Volunteers this way: "PCVs are patriotic and adventuresome -- with the patience of Job, the perseverance of a saint, and the digestive system of an ostrich!!!"
- In our 50 years of collaboration with the Royal Thai Government, over 5,000 Peace Corps Volunteers of all ages and backgrounds have served in this country. That adds up to more than 10,000 years of service and partnership between the Thai people and the American people. What an incredible legacy of friendship and peace!
- Our Volunteers have served in education, health, forestry, fisheries, small business development, environment, youth and agriculture. All worked on projects that were the priorities of their Thai communities. All have learned to speak Thai; all have learned to embrace Thai culture; all have formed strong friendships with their communities; and all have learned to love Thai cooking! I don't know if Peace Corps has anything to do with the fact that Thai food is the most popular cuisine in the United States, but given how much Peace Corps Volunteers eat, it can't have hurt!!!
- And the Peace Corps Volunteers I know, who have had the good fortune of being assigned to the "Land of Smiles" have said that they have received so much more than they have given. Your people are so welcoming, so open to our Volunteers, so willing to share your language, culture and traditions – it is not surprising that Peace Corps Volunteers become lifelong ambassadors for Thailand, wherever they go.
- After completing Peace Corps service, most of our Volunteers return to the United States. When they leave, they leave a bit of their heart here in Thailand – and they bring a bit of Thailand back to the United States with them in their hearts. Most of them say they feel half Thai because of the warm welcome you gave them when they lived and worked among you.

- Part of their commitment upon return is to tell the people of the United States about Thailand. They speak to schools, Rotary clubs, community groups and the media about their Peace Corps experience in Thailand. In that way, they help Americans to learn more about Thailand and build a stronger bond between our two countries.
- Many former Peace Corps Volunteers from Thailand have gone on to careers in politics, academia, business, diplomacy, and government. Most still do volunteer work beyond their professional jobs, often with an international component. Wherever they go, they tell people about the warm welcome they received in Thailand, and about the work that they and their communities were able to accomplish together. Please know that more than 5,000 Americans consider themselves to be true "*kone Thai*" in their hearts.
- There is no question in my mind that both of our countries have benefited enormously from our 50 years of partnership and service. The bonds of friendship and understanding between our countries have been strengthened through our cooperation.
- War, famine, poverty, disease – all those things that drove President John F. Kennedy to create the Peace Corps in 1961 still exist today. Indeed, one could argue that the stakes are even higher now in 2012. The need for world peace and friendship is just as clear now as it was in 1961.
- The world we face today is qualitatively different from the world in which Peace Corps was created. Globalization, the digital revolution, the world economic crisis and the prospect of climate instability are triggering new concerns – and demand a new kind of global citizen. Today, more than ever before, the security and economic prosperity of all nations, including Thailand and the United States, are inextricably linked.
- Over the past decade, numerous reports and policy statements have emphasized the complexity, diversity and interdependency of our modern world, and the need for new skills and approaches for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- In our interconnected world, both the United States and Thailand need citizens who can speak other languages, understand other cultures, and work with people from other nations to solve the world's greatest challenges. To be prepared for a world of growing cultural interaction and diversity, we need citizens who can understand other people's perspectives and find commonalities with our own. By working together, serving together, in host communities throughout Thailand, Peace Corps Volunteers and Thai citizens are learning the skills they need to operate effectively in this interconnected world.
- The partnership between the Peace Corps and the people of Thailand benefits both our nations in a powerful and unique way – in a way that is not accomplished by any other means. The reason for this is that the story of Peace Corps in Thailand is largely a story of the strength of relationships, and the power of human interaction to change the lives and the hearts of both Thais and Americans.

- So, in closing, I offer my congratulations and thanks to all of you for your support of Peace Corps/Thailand's 50 years of service. On behalf of Peace Corps, and our Director, Aaron Williams, I thank you for your dedicated, outstanding work and your commitment to making the world a better place through mutual collaboration.
- *Kop khun maak ka.*