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Statement by Senator Edmund S. Muskie on the Tenth Anniversary of the Peace Corps

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**STATEMENT BY SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE
ON THE
TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PEACE CORPS
MARCH 1, 1971**

Mr. Muskie

Mr. President, today, Monday, March 1, marks the tenth anniversary of the Peace Corps. This is an occasion for expressing thanks to those Americans who through their Peace Corps service have worked so effectively for their country and for mankind; it is also an occasion for reflection on what the future holds for the Peace Corps and other volunteer organizations in America.

On March 1, 1961, President Kennedy established the Peace Corps. Its purpose has been to promote world peace and friendship through providing American men and women to help other countries meet their needs for trained manpower, and through increasing understanding between the American people and the peoples of the countries served.

I believe the Peace Corps has been carrying out these purposes effectively. Since 1961, over 50,000 Americans have served in the Peace Corps in more than 60 foreign countries. These volunteers have made significant tangible contributions to the development of the countries where they have served. For example, countless numbers of students have been taught, communities developed, skills imparted, agricultural methods improved, and health programs established. Equally important have been the intangibles. To mention but a few: the growth in communication at a people-to-people level between our country and other countries with whom in many cases we had had little previous contact; the imparting of the principle of self-help, which has been a major element in these volunteer efforts; and the increased skills and dedication with which most Peace Corps Volunteers have returned to America.

There have been setbacks along the way, and disillusionment among some Volunteers. But overall, the Peace Corps in the last ten years has demonstrated that large numbers of average Americans can be trained and sent overseas to make a meaningful contribution to development. Beyond this, the Peace Corps has helped show the world that America is more than military might or material achievement -- that America is also humane; that we care. It has thus embodied what I consider to be one of our great qualities as a people: our concern for the individual, whomever he may be; and the deeper his circumstances, the deeper our concern.

In the 1960's, the Peace Corps concept was emulated here in the United States and by other countries. VISTA and the Teacher Corps came into being at the Federal level, and similar organizations -- both private and public -- developed at the state and local level. There began in a sense a "volunteer service" movement. It was a new development, and yet also an outgrowth of our fine tradition of volunteerism which has been so long expressed in our community service organizations.

But in the last few years this volunteer service movement seems to have faltered. The number of persons applying for and serving in the Peace Corps has markedly declined. VISTA and the Teacher Corps, after promising starts, have leveled off at a minimum size. No new programs have been developed.

I believe it is important to America that the decline in this movement be reversed. I further believe this can only be done by basic changes in governmental policies that will restimulate the desire of our people to serve as representatives of America overseas or here at home. Without such rejuvenation of the desire to serve, the mere amalgamation of volunteer programs, which the President suggested in January, will probably be of little consequence.

With respect to the Peace Corps, this rejuvenation requires a foreign policy which ceases to be established primarily on Cold War concepts and its replacement by a foreign policy that places our ideals above our fears, that seeks long-term peace rather than short-term tactical advantage, and that emphasizes what we as Americans stand for as well as what we stand against. On the domestic side, this rejuvenation needs a recommitment to a meaningful attack on poverty in the United States, to the saving of our environment, and to the overcoming of the morass of problems that consume our urban areas. Only with basic changes such as these can a climate be restored in which the people of the country truly want to serve.

Thus, on this the tenth anniversary of the Peace Corps, I congratulate all those who have answered the call to service -- in the Peace Corps, and in the host of other private and public volunteer organizations; and I urge that we as a nation commit ourselves to rekindle the Peace Corps spirit, so that Americans will continue to have not only the vehicles through which to serve their fellow men but also the desire to do so.

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