



MEMORANDUM

To: George Kohl and Maureen Feely-Kohl
Denise Kelly
Cindy and Ivon DIOUF

From: Henry McKoy
Africa Region Director

CC: Lisa Ellis, Country Director, Guinea

Date: February 11, 2003

Subject: Regional Houses in Guinea

Thank you for your correspondence regarding the closure of the Regional houses in Guinea. I would like to take this opportunity to address your concerns.

Peace Corps/Washington and Peace Corps/Guinea together have been studying this issue for a long while, and in recognition of the importance of Regional gathering places, the Country Director has had very productive discussions about the rationale for reconfiguring the houses with the Volunteer Action Committee, Volunteers during in-service training, and new trainees. Consequently, working together, Peace Corps has developed a working plan that meets our needs without sacrificing the Volunteer experience or safety.

Peace Corps/Guinea is not closing the Regional houses, but is reconfiguring two of them into Regional facilities, and moving them to new locations. Regional houses currently have an Information Resource Center, a sick room, a kitchen, living room, bedrooms that sleep 15-20 Volunteers, phone and radio communications, 24-hour guard service, and a vehicle and driver. The Peace Corps Volunteer Leader also lives at the house.

The new Regional facilities will retain everything that is currently found in the Regional houses except the dormitory facilities. The Country Director has researched safe lodging options in hotels and hostels in the Regional capitals and has determined that these accommodations are better suited for our needs. They are by nature better equipped to lodge large numbers of people, and supply them with the necessary facilities. They are safe locations, and close to the business centers that Volunteers use. The third house is not being reconfigured at this time specifically

because appropriate public lodging facilities have not yet been identified. Volunteers currently receive a transportation allowance to visit their Regional capitals once a month for business purposes and will receive a lodging allowance as well to cover the cost of staying in a hotel or hostel.

It has been Peace Corps' experience that the Volunteer's site is the safest location in the Host country. Volunteers become members of the community through their work, their ability to speak the local language and their association with friends in the community. Volunteers who leave their sites on a regular basis run the risk of not establishing these vital relationships and of experiencing a disconnect from their community members. In terms of security concerns related to civil unrest, political instability and crime, experience has shown that Volunteers are much safer away from the Regional capitals and at their sites.

However, Peace Corps fully realizes the importance of Volunteers leaving their sites for business and personal reasons, and in sharing their experiences with their fellow Volunteers. Peace Corps/Guinea has a policy in place that allows Volunteers two nights per month away from their sites without taking vacation time so that they may take some time to visit their neighboring Volunteers. The change in the structure of the Regional houses will not affect that.

Safety and security of the Volunteers remains Peace Corps' highest priority as does providing an environment in which Volunteers can accomplish the goals of their mission. We strongly believe that the new arrangement is safer for the Volunteers and that Volunteers will be better served in terms of their own work and personal security.

Again, thank you for your letter.