Another Peace Corps Volunteer Dismissed for Being HIV-Positive

May 16, 2008

In January, the Peace Corps dismissed volunteer Jeremiah S. Johnson, 25, after he tested HIV-positive during his service in the Ukraine. Along with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Johnson is working to bring legal action against the Peace Corps; at the time of his ouster, the corps stated that he was the first volunteer to be diagnosed with the virus. But in the May 16 edition of *The Washington Post*, reporter Stephen Barr reveals that of the 75,000 Americans who have joined the Peace Corps since 1989, 36 have tested positive either during or at the conclusion of their overseas tours (washingtonpost.com, 5/16).

According to the article, one of these volunteers, Rebecca M. Coulborn—who was serving in the sub-Saharan nation of Burkina Faso—was removed from service in 2001, within 48 hours of her diagnosis. “I was told that was Peace Corps policy,” she said. “If you did test HIV-positive, you were medically separated from the Peace Corps.”

The story notes that volunteers who develop any medical condition that cannot be resolved within 45 days are medically separated from the rest of the corps. However, in response to the outcry over Johnson’s removal, the Peace Corps says it will reevaluate its policy.

“The Peace Corps is now committed to extending the individualized assessments in these types of cases to include whether a newly infected volunteer could be reasonably accommodated and either kept at post or sent to another post in lieu of medical separation,” the organization wrote in a letter to the ACLU. “We cannot commit to a guarantee of reassignment.”

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