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It has come to my attention that the Peace Corps Afghanistan Food For Work Volunteers who participated in Operation Help in 1972 were not recognized for their important work in alleviating the suffering of those who were the victims of a multiyear famine and drought condition in the country. Now, during the 2005 Peace Corps Afghanistan Reunion in Las Vegas, Nevada, I want to take the opportunity to remedy this oversight and to recognize your contribution to what was designated as one of the ten most successful USAID projects in the world in 1972.

As a result of mounting and sustained international pressure to solve the humanitarian problem of starvation and disease in Afghanistan, the U.S. Ambassador, Robert Neumann, met with Zahir Shah, the King of Afghanistan, to discuss what measures could be taken to help the people. After the meeting the Ambassador appointed me, the Assistant Director for Management for the USAID Mission to Afghanistan, to assist the Afghan government in another effort to feed the people and relieve their pain and suffering. The project became known as Operation Help.

After five failed attempts to solve the problem, it had become a crisis that required exceptional action and people who cared. You stepped forward as a volunteer, and your leadership made a difference. Your energy, determination and resourcefulness merit commendation. Your presence motivated your Afghan colleagues to achieve high levels of performance.

Our tasks were of immense proportion and the obstacles were many. We were forced to base planning on broad assumptions since there were no real estimates of how many people needed help and their location was vaguely determined. What we did know was that people were dying of starvation and disease was rampant. Nobody knows how many died. Management and logistical activities were carried out under extreme circumstances. Most roads were undeveloped, distances were great, communications were inadequate, facilities were nonexistent, time elements were restrictive and we had to move over some of the most difficult terrain in the world.

Through your initiative, your dedication, and your selflessness we overcame the challenges and gave life and renewed hope to the long-suffering population. Your devotion to duty and your willingness to give of yourself reflects great credit on you as an individual and on the Peace Corps. Your actions reflect the best traditions of our country. You have earned the gratitude of many and can be proud of the standards of excellence you achieved.

A person, in their lifetime, is seldom given an opportunity to save even one life. In your case, with your commitment, compassion, and high sense of purpose you saved many thousands of lives.

Many years have passed and I still think warmly of having had the chance to serve with such an outstanding group of Peace Corps volunteers and great Americans. I offer my heartfelt thanks to you for helping to make Operation Help a success and for a job well done. We solved the problem and I am proud of your participation.

Sincerely,


Abe S. Ashcanase
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