

2003 PVO CONFERENCE:

VOLUNTEERS FOR PROSPERITY

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Administrator Andrew Natsios introduced John Bridgeland, Assistant to the President and Director, USA Freedom Corps, to discuss the Volunteers for Prosperity initiative. A summary of Mr. Bridgeland's presentation follows.

Mr. Bridgeland began by praising Mr. Natsios for his leadership at USAID. He provided an overview of the USA Freedom Corps, which was established in 2002 to connect Americans with volunteer service opportunities. In the aftermath of 9/11, Americans have volunteered in large numbers to serve their communities. Eight hundred Citizen Corps Councils have been established in all 56 states and territories to respond to disasters, Medical Reserve Corps are active in 165 communities, and neighborhood watch programs have doubled.

President Bush has pledged to double the capacity of the Peace Corps to 15,000 volunteers. Last year, the Peace Corps received its largest funding allocation since its inception 41 years ago. This year, the Peace Corps has received 216,000 requests for applications for 7,000 volunteer slots.

On May 21, 2003, President Bush announced the Volunteers for Prosperity (VFP) initiative to deploy highly skilled American professionals—doctors, nurses, and computer technicians—for flexible-term assignments (i.e., weeks or months) abroad. Many people decide against volunteering with the Peace Corps because the two-year commitment is too lengthy. VFP provides an alternative. VFP will be administered through U.S. private voluntary organizations (PVOs), targeting key initiatives where new federal resources are available to implement the Administration's "prosperity and health agenda."

VFP will be coordinated by USAID. In September 2003, President Bush signed an executive order to: 1) establish VFP offices in USAID, the State Department, the Department of Commerce, and the Department of Health and Human Services; 2) establish as a grant criterion the capacity of PVOs to use volunteers to carry out programs; and 3) establish reporting requirements.

PVOs can apply for VFP funding under six federal initiatives: the Emergency Plan for HIV/AIDS Relief; the Middle East Partnership Initiative; the Water for the Poor Initiative; Trade for African Development; the Digital Freedom Initiative; and the Millennium Challenge Account.

Since the President's announcement, 42 PVOs have expressed interest in signing on with VFP, yielding a baseline of 10-11,000 volunteers. Mr. Bridgeland said he hopes to double the number of VFP volunteers in one year. The VFP web site is operational (see www.vfp.gov).

Finally, Mr. Bridgeland noted that the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation issues the President's Volunteer Service Awards to youth under age 14 who complete 50 hours of volunteer service in 1 year, and to adults who complete 100

hours of service in 1 year. PVOs can sign up to be certifying organizations for this award. Information can be found at: www.usafreedomcorps.gov. Mr. Bridgeland added that PVOs interested in VFP can call Ken Lanza at USA Freedom Corps at 202-456-7831.