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Dear IVS Alumni and Friends,

It is with enormous sadness, tempered by equally enormous appreciation for all that International Voluntary Services has accomplished over its nearly half century of existence, that we write to inform you of the Board's decision this week to dissolve IVS by the end of March 2002.

For nearly 50 years in over 40 countries around the world, IVS has served as a model of grassroots volunteerism in international development. It has also acted, in the process, as a catalyst in the creation of other voluntary movements, including the U.S. Peace Corps and domestic groups within the countries where IVSers have served. Thus, IVS has been part of a long chain of volunteer programs that have touched many people both in the U.S. and in the developing world through the years.

IVS began in 1953 with Americans offering technical assistance overseas, then pioneered by including volunteers of other nationalities and, finally, by emphasizing the contributions of local volunteers in the development process. Our volunteers' goal has always been to "work ourselves out of a job" as local staff and community volunteers acquired the skills to take responsibility themselves. Although we would not now claim that IVS as a whole has completed this process—nor that the interpersonal and cross-cultural dimensions of the IVS role are no longer needed—we can certainly take pride in the small role we have played in contributing to what is in many (if not all) ways a better world today.

We assure you that the decision to dissolve was not taken precipitously or lightly. It is no secret that we have faced serious funding challenges in the past decade, particularly since losing first our majority, then even our matching, and subsequently minority funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development. The fact that we have been able to continue our programming and contribute to human progress through volunteer action is testimony to the creativity, commitment, and plain hard work of many dedicated individuals.

Last year we received a remarkable challenge offer from a dedicated IVS alum to establish a substantial IVS endowment. Responses from a number of alumni and friends have indeed been gratifying. Nonetheless, the Board has had to consider not only the level of donations needed to fund an endowment that would provide a significant annual income, but also the substantial annual funding needed to keep our very doors open and allow us to carry out our work on a sufficiently meaningful basis to make IVS proud. Rather than continue to eke out an existence that relies almost exclusively on volunteer staffing, and in the face of significant changes in the world situation and ever-increasing fund-raising competition—September 11 was simply the straw that broke the camel's back—we decided the time had finally come to close our organization.

We end our existence with a solid reputation around the world, all our bills paid, and the ability of our overseas partners to continue their important work as national organizations. We are not leaving any of them unacceptably in the lurch. We have also created a committee of the Board to examine the feasibility of establishing a separate IVS fund that can serve as a means to assist

"...promoting sustainable development and international understanding..."

selected overseas programs that IVS has been instrumental in supporting over the years. This would allow for any continuing contributions, legacies, or other opportunities stemming from IVS alumni or friends in the future. And, of course, we all support the active continuation and even strengthening of the IVS Alumni Association to keep up the bonds that so many of us have appreciated over the years since those formative days of overseas service with IVS.

We want particularly to thank Anne Shirk, our largely voluntary executive director for the past three years, for all her efforts to keep IVS not only alive but also contributing significantly through times of great difficulty. Most importantly in these final months, her efforts will enable us to conclude our work with heads held high.

Though we must conclude the life and work of IVS as a formal organization, we recognize that its tasks are far from finished. The challenges facing today's world are perhaps greater than ever as recent events have demonstrated. We urge you to step up to those challenges. And we thank all of you who have made IVS a great institution, the official passing of which we inevitably regret, but whose life can surely be celebrated for the meaning it has given to so many around the world.

Our holiday wish for all is peace in our hearts and in our world,

Jeanette

Jeanette Goodstein
Chair, Board of Directors

Steve

Stephen Nichols
Vice Chair, Board of Directors

In parting, I want you to know that my years with IVS have been among the most rewarding of my life. Though not a volunteer, I have known of IVS since the 1960s. As Executive Director I visited all the countries where we are currently working, met with our field directors and staffs as well as our partner organizations, and visited our projects. Today all our field directors are native to the country where they serve, underscoring our desire to "work ourselves out of a job".

On September 11th when I finally reached my home, all of our field directors had called me expressing their concerns and great sympathy, and before the day was over our Cambodia and Vietnam partners had emailed. Reading email from Cambodia my tears began to flow – how people from that benighted country who have had more tragedy in the last three decades than any of us can even imagine had such compassion and concern for us on that day was overwhelming. Many former volunteers from abroad wrote and called during the next few days, all expressing concern for our staff and recalling the wonderful and life-changing experience of being IVSers.

It is difficult to realize that the time to dissolve IVS has come. The Board and I have tried hard to reverse this course. Many former volunteers and friends of IVS have served as pro-bono consultants in program development efforts. At this time when I know our kind of grassroots development is imperative, we simply cannot find the funding necessary to continue. I am deeply appreciative to all who have supported IVS. You have been our strongest resource!

I shall look forward to celebrating 50 years of IVS with you in 2003 – an event the Alumni Association is even now planning. I shall leave with a heavy heart, as will the Board. But we all can be assured that the seeds planted by IVSers in the soils, as well as in the minds of people, in the far-flung reaches of our world continue to flourish. We cannot ask for more!

May your holidays be blessed!

Anne