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Former Peace Corps Volunteer Pleads Guilty in Connecticut to Sexually Abusing Children in South Africa

WASHINGTON – A Milford, Conn., man pleaded guilty today in Hartford to sexually abusing four minor girls while he was a volunteer with the U.S. Peace Corps in South Africa, announced Assistant Attorney General Lanny A. Breuer of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney David B. Fein of the District of Connecticut, Peace Corps Director Aaron S. Williams and Special Agent in Charge Bruce M. Foucart of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) in New England.

Jesse Osmun, 32, pleaded guilty before Chief U.S. District Judge Alvin W. Thompson to one count of traveling from the United States to South Africa and engaging in illicit sexual conduct with children.

"While serving as a Peace Corps volunteer in South Africa, Mr. Osmun committed horrific, unforgivable crimes," said Assistant Attorney General Breuer. "He was supposed to be helping young children in need, many of whom were orphans, but instead, he preyed upon them, sexually abusing several young girls under the age of six. He betrayed the Peace Corps and the children he had traveled to South Africa to help. For his predatory conduct, he faces up to 30 years in prison."

"Our investigation demonstrated that this defendant sexually abused young girls while he served as a Peace Corps volunteer in South Africa," said U.S. Attorney Fein. "This was a reprehensible crime, an extraordinary abuse of trust and an unconscionable violation of the Peace Corps mission. I commend the Peace Corps Office of Inspector General (OIG), ICE Homeland Security Investigations and the South African Police Service for their prompt and thorough investigation of child sexual abuse. Their efforts undoubtedly protected children from future harm and removed a dangerous child predator from society."

"The crimes of this former volunteer are reprehensible," said Peace Corps Director Williams. "The Peace Corps has no tolerance for abuse of any kind, and our deepest sympathies are with all the victims involved. I am thankful to the Peace Corps OIG, the Department of Justice, ICE Homeland Security Investigations and the South African Police Service for conducting a well coordinated investigation that brought about swift justice in this case. The Peace Corps is committed to ensuring that the children affected by these crimes receive proper care and treatment."

"This investigation represents the very essence of the determination of federal, state and local law enforcement authorities to capture and prosecute an individual whose primary objective was to sexually abuse vulnerable children," said HSI Special Agent in Charge Foucart. "I hope that this guilty plea sends a clear message that we will continue to aggressively pursue individuals who engage in this behavior to ensure that there is no place to hide here in the United States or anywhere in the world. I want to thank our partners at the U.S. attorney's office for their tireless efforts and collaboration in this investigation."

According to court documents and statements made in court, Osmun was sworn in as a Peace Corps volunteer in March 2009 and began his service at a non-governmental organization (NGO) in South Africa that provides education, food and other services to children, many of whom are orphans. In May 2011, Osmun resigned from the Peace Corps after being confronted by the program director of the NGO with allegations of sexual abuse. He

returned to the United States on June 2, 2011. Shortly thereafter, Peace Corps OIG and ICE HSI agents, working with members of the South African Police Services, began investigating the allegations of abuse.

According to court documents, the investigation revealed that, while volunteering at the NGO, Osmun enticed four young girls, all of whom were under the age of six, to engage in illicit sexual conduct with him. Osmun persuaded the children to engage in this conduct by playing games with them and providing them with candy. Osmun sexually abused one of the victims approximately two times a week over the course of approximately five months.

On Aug. 4, 2011, Osmun was arrested at his home in Milford. He has been detained since his arrest.

Judge Thompson scheduled sentencing for Sept. 19, 2012. Osmun faces a maximum sentence of 30 years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000.

U.S. Attorney Fein noted that the government is seeking restitution from the defendant, and that the Department of Justice, the Peace Corps and the U.S. Embassy in South Africa are working together to ensure that a fund will be available to provide assistance to the victims in this case.

“Supporting victims of child exploitation is a priority for this United States Attorney’s Office and for the Department of Justice,” said U.S. Attorney Fein. “Our work does not end with the apprehension and conviction of those who sexually exploit children but extends appropriately to the welfare of the child victims.”

This case is being investigated by the Peace Corps OIG and ICE HSI. Investigative assistance has been provided by members of the South African Police Service Directorate for Priority Crime Investigations; ICE’s attaché office in Pretoria, South Africa; the ICE Cybercrimes Center in Fairfax, Va.; the U.S. Department of State’s regional security office in Durban, South Africa; and the South Africa National Prosecuting Authority. The case is being prosecuted by U.S. Attorney David B. Fein, Assistant U.S. Attorney Krishna R. Patel and Trial Attorney Bonnie Kane of the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section in the Justice Department’s Criminal Division.

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Criminal Division