

Dear Families,

Greetings from the Togo Desk in Washington, D.C. It is with great pleasure that we welcome your family member to the Togo training program. Over the years we have received many questions from Volunteers and family members alike regarding travel plans, sending money, relaying messages and mail, etc. As we are unable to involve ourselves in the personal arrangements of Volunteers, we would like to offer you advice and assistance in advance by providing specific examples of situations and how we suggest they be handled.

1. Irregular Communication. *(Please see #3 for the mailing address to Peace Corps' office in Lomé the capital of Togo).* The mail service in Togo is not as efficient as the U.S. Postal Service. Thus, it is important to be patient. It can take from three to four weeks for mail coming from Togo to arrive in the United States via the Togolese mail system. From a Volunteer's post, mail might take up to one to two months to reach the United States depending upon how far the Volunteer is from the capital city, Lomé. Sometimes mail is hand carried to the States by a traveler and mailed through the U.S. postal system. This leg of the trip can take another several weeks as it is also dependent on the frequency of travelers to the U.S.

We suggest that in your first letters, you ask your Volunteer family member to give an estimate of how long it takes for him or her to receive your letters and then try to establish a predictable pattern of how often you will write to each other. Also try numbering your letters so that the Volunteer knows if he or she missed one. Postcards should be sent in envelopes--otherwise they may be found on the wall of the local post office.

Volunteers often enjoy telling their "war" stories when they write home. Letters might describe recent illnesses, lack of good food, isolation, etc. While the subject matter is often good reading material, it is often misinterpreted on the home front. Please do not assume that if your family member gets sick that he or she has not been attended to. The city of Lomé has medical and dental facilities, and there is a Peace Corps Medical Officer there as well. Most Volunteers can reach Lomé in less than one day's time. Many Volunteers also have access to a telephone so that they can call our Medical Office. In the event of a serious illness the Volunteer is sent to Lomé and is cared for by our Medical Unit. If the Volunteer requires medical care that is not available in Togo, he/she will be medically evacuated to South Africa or to the United States. Fortunately, such circumstances are very rare.

If for some reason your communication pattern is broken and you do not hear from your family member for at least one month, you should contact the **Counseling and Outreach Unit (COU) at Peace Corps in Washington at 1-800-424-8580, extension 1470 (or direct: 202-692-1470)**. The COU will then call the Peace Corps Director in Lomé, and ask her to check up on the Volunteer. Also, in the case of an emergency at home (death in the family, sudden illness, etc.), please do not hesitate to call COU immediately, so that the Volunteer can be informed by a member of Peace Corps/Togo staff.

2. Telephone Calls. The telephone system in Togo has fairly reliable service to the United States. In the interior of the country, where most of our Volunteers are located, the system is less reliable. Most Volunteers have access to a telephone in or nearby their site.

When dialing direct to Togo from the U.S., dial 011 (the international access code) + 228 (the country code) + the number. Volunteers generally set up phone calls with people in the U.S. in advance, and have the distant party call them, which is much less expensive than calling the U.S. from Togo. Many volunteers decide to purchase cellphones once they arrive in Togo, but they may not always have regular reception at their site.

The Togo Desk in Washington, D.C. usually calls the Peace Corps office in Lomé at least once a week. However, these calls are reserved for business only and we cannot relay personal messages over the phone. If you have an **urgent message**, however, and have exhausted your other means (regarding travel plans, etc.), you can call the Desk, and the message will be relayed.

3. Sending Packages. Parents and Volunteers like to send and receive care packages through the mail. Unfortunately, sending packages can be a frustrating experience for all involved due to the high incidence of theft and heavy customs taxes. You may want to send inexpensive items through the mail, but there is no guarantee that these items will arrive. We do not recommend, however, that costly items be sent through the mail. Most Volunteers choose to get local post office boxes, and this address will most likely change after pre-service training:

**John Doe, PCV
Corps de la Paix
B.P. 3194
Lomé, Togo
West Africa**

It is recommended that packages be sent in padded envelopes if possible, as boxes tend to be taxed more frequently. Packages can be sent via surface mail (2-3 weeks arrival time) or by ship (4-6 months). The difference in cost can be a factor in deciding which method to utilize. For lightweight but important items (e.g. airline tickets), DHL (an express mail service) does operate in Lomé, but costs are very expensive. If you choose to send items through DHL, you must address the package to the Country Director, s/c Corps de la Paix, 48 Rue de Rossignols, Quartier Kodjoviakopé, Lomé, Togo. The telephone number for the Peace Corps office in Togo is (228) 221-0614, should DHL need this information. If you send the item to the Country Director, no liability can be assumed. For more information about DHL, please call their toll free number, 1-800-CALL-DHL, or visit their web site at www.dhl.com. Please be aware that there is a customs fee for all DHL packages sent to Volunteers. For each DHL package, the Volunteer will be taxed 10,000 CFA (roughly US\$20).

Sending airplane tickets and/or cash is not recommended. Certain airlines will allow you to buy a prepaid ticket in the States; they will telex their Lomé office to have the ticket ready. Unfortunately, this system is not always reliable. Many airlines (e.g., KLM, Air France, Ghana Airways, Air Togo) fly into Lomé or Accra, but each has its own policy on pre-paid tickets. Please call the airline of your choice for more information. You could also send tickets via DHL as mentioned previously. However, Peace Corps will assume no liability in the event of a lost/stolen airline ticket.

Trying to send cash or airline tickets is very risky and is discouraged. If your Volunteer family member requests money from you, it is his/her responsibility to arrange receipt of it. Some Volunteers use Western Union, which has an office in Lomé. Volunteers will also be aware of people visiting the States and can request that they call his/her family when they arrive in the States should airline tickets need to be sent back to Togo.

4. E-mail. There is fairly reliable e-mail service in Togo with cyber cafes in most large towns. Connections can be very slow and time consuming as well as costly. E-mail, however, may become the preferred method of communication between you and your family member in Togo. Not all Volunteers have access to e-mail on a daily basis but they should be able to read and send messages at least once a month. As with other means of communication, do not be alarmed if you do not receive daily or weekly

messages. Unless in Lomé at the office, Volunteers have to pay for internet time at cyber cafes and this can be a slow or expensive process depending on the connection at the café.

We hope this information is helpful to you during the time your family member is serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Togo. We understand how frustrating it is to communicate with your family member overseas and we appreciate your using this information as a guideline. Please feel free to contact us at the Togo Desk in Washington, DC, if you have further questions. You can find our telephone numbers below.

Sincerely,

Ana Cardoso

Country Desk Officer

1-800-424-8580, option 2, ext. 2332

(202) 692-2326