

The Value of Serving in Challenging Posts

This month marks the beginning of the 2011 Afghanistan/Iraq/Pakistan assignments season. As we look for talented volunteers for these positions in the Department's highest priority posts, I encourage you to consider what you can do.

Though hardship tours, particularly at unaccompanied posts, can be demanding, I have found such service to be among my most personally and professionally rewarding experiences. I have generally encountered a much stronger sense of community in hardship posts and have had the opportunity to do interesting, meaningful and challenging work.

Hardship posts such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan force you to rely on Department colleagues, local staff, military and others. That can create lifelong bonds. Unaccompanied posts require you to draw on your ingenuity, originality and fortitude as well as those same capabilities in others. You will have the opportunity to use your considerable skills and talents to make a positive difference in ensuring our national security.

Our surveys continue to show that the main incentive for, and rewards from, service in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan continue to be the opportunity to make a difference. We do, however, provide a package of more tangible incentives, including special differentials and additional R&Rs, that reflect the unusual working and living conditions at these posts.

We also have numerous positions that are available to employee spouses at post. In fact, 40 percent of all family members overseas work at post or on the local economy, according to the Family Liaison Office. The U.S. Missions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan permit adult Eligible Family Members to accompany the employee if the EFM is employed and receives permission from the Bureau of Management, and this is an important incentive. More information on overseas family member employment is at <http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c1959.htm>.

While these tours present some unique demands for our employees and their families, we do have resources to help you. For example, we now have dedicated positions for an Unaccompanied Tours Support Officer and an Unaccompanied Tours Program Specialist to work with our families while employees are serving in unaccompanied tours. We have also contracted with

MHN (formerly the Managed Health Network) to provide around-the-clock Web and telephone-based support services, as well as face-to-face counseling sessions with a clinician for family members residing outside the Washington, D.C., area.

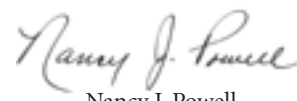
We value service at hardship posts, and I am proud to say that our dedicated employees and retirees continue to step forward. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has recognized the sacrifices of those serving in hardship and danger posts.

"I have asked for your support many times as Secretary, and you have always provided it," she said in a recent speech.

In that talk, she noted the challenges for the Department in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and said, "We need dedicated members of both the Foreign and Civil Services to step forward and take on these challenges, with the courage, experience and dedication for which State Department employees are known around the world."

You deserve our best support, and we are determined to provide that for you.

If you have any general comments or suggestions about what we can do to further support our employees serving in unaccompanied posts, you can send them to me via unclassified e-mail at dgdirect@state.gov. ■



Nancy J. Powell
Director General

