

U.S. Peace Corps to Leave Kazakhstan

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ALMATY — The U.S. Peace Corps is withdrawing nearly 120 volunteers from Kazakhstan, ending its 18-year presence in Central Asia's largest economy following a spate of Islamist militant attacks.

The Peace Corps said Friday that it was suspending its operations in Kazakhstan for "a number of operational considerations," without giving further details. It said its 117 volunteers in the country were safe.

More than 1,120 Peace Corps volunteers have served in Kazakhstan since 1993, working with communities in projects focused on teaching English, education, youth development and HIV prevention.

Some officials say Kazakhstan, where per capita gross domestic product exceeds \$9,000, has outgrown the need for the Peace Corps. Kazakhstan's Ministry of Education and Science said the suspension was "a logical step" given the country's development.

But Larisa Koisina, headmistress of a private school in the central Kazakh city of Karagandy where two Peace Corps volunteers had taught, said she believed that the withdrawal could be

linked to a spate of militant attacks in a country long viewed as comparatively peaceful.

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