To whom it may concern,

My name is Shou Yuan and I am currently serving as a volunteer in the United States Peace Corps, working as an English teacher in the Sub-Saharan African nation of Zambia. I have completed my first 2 years of service and will be extending for a third year starting next month in August.

I am also an artist.

Before joining the Peace Corps in June of 2013, I attended California College of the Arts, majoring in illustration. I completed some illustration work as well, but realized quickly that I had a powerful urge to leave the world that I knew and see something different. I believe a person's art is dependent on what they have done and seen; the more vibrant experiences they go through, the more powerful their artwork becomes.

It was with this conviction that I left my home, my family, my mentors, and my friends. Over the past two years, I have fractured a collarbone, been medevaced for surgical procedures twice, survived malaria infections, had various intestinal illnesses, and endured numerous other assaults on my physical and mental health. I have taught children to read, learned a new language and a new culture, grown a garden and tree nursery, conducted health educational programming, attended weddings and danced along with my neighbors, attended the funerals of some of my students, and had a number of other surreal, unforgettable experiences.

Throughout all of this, I have made art. And I intend to continue to do so, to make images that are published in various mediums. Images that speak for myself as well as for all that I have experienced.

I did not make the sacrifices I have made in order to develop my craft, one day returning to professional art making, in order to have the basic Constitutional rights I have in regards to my creative work dismissed. To me, copyright law is not an abstract concept, but a reality of my work's value. My copyright to my art is the bedrock on which my work as a artist rests. My copyrights are my products. They determine the use of my images, along their worth. Therefore, copyright infringment of my work is no different than stealing from me outright. It is essential to my profession that I remain able to determine voluntarily how and by whom my work is used. My work does not lose its value upon publication; rather, everything I create becomes part of my creative inventory. In this modern world where international image transfer through the internet is constant and instantaneous, my artistic control of this inventory of my creative imagery is more valuable than ever before.

I urge you to consider these facts about the work of a creative professional as you conduct your proceedings in regards to this legislation, and understand the sacrifices that many of us in the creative profession have made in order to be able to make such work. The work we make is never made without immense effort, and should be valued as such.

Thank you very much. Warm greetings from the Republic of Zambia.

Best,
Shou Yuan
United States Peace Corps Volunteer - Zambia
Mansa, Luapula Province