



# Department of Justice

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## STATEMENT BY ATTORNEY GENERAL MICHAEL B. MUKASEY ON THE FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FAIR HOUSING ACT

Forty years ago, this Nation made a commitment to provide for fair access to housing throughout the United States with the enactment of the Fair Housing Act. The original Act, passed only days after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., made it illegal to discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, or religion in the sale, rental or financing of housing. On several occasions since that time, we have reaffirmed and expanded our country's dedication to the principle of fair housing, extending the Act's protections to include sex, disability, and familial status and providing for much-needed enforcement tools.

In April 2008, which the President has proclaimed National Fair Housing Month, we celebrate the Fair Housing Act's fortieth anniversary with a renewed commitment to achieving its goals. The right protected by the Act – to live wherever one wants and can afford – is at the heart of the American dream, and for 40 years we have striven to make that dream a reality for all Americans. The Department of Justice has brought hundreds of cases based on discrimination because of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, disability or familial status. We have required scores of landlords, real estate companies, builders, lenders and local governments to implement non-discriminatory policies and procedures. We have obtained millions of dollars of compensation for victims of discrimination. And we have convicted dozens of defendants who have threatened families by burning crosses outside their homes.

However, there is more work to be done. As we mark this anniversary of the Fair Housing Act and celebrate National Fair Housing Month, therefore, we re-dedicate ourselves to combating housing discrimination in all its forms, from home sales to apartment rentals, and from home mortgage loans to property insurance. More generally, we recommit ourselves to the principle that housing must be available to all Americans without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, religion, disability or familial status. Forty years ago, housing discrimination on these bases was often blatant, if not bloody. Today, covert, subtle discrimination is far more common. But the results are no less pernicious.

Two years ago, the Department of Justice launched Operation Home Sweet Home to combat the more hidden forms of discrimination prevalent today. Through improved and increased discrimination testing and public awareness efforts, the initiative aims to expose and eliminate housing discrimination in America. The results have been impressive. In Fiscal Year 2007, the Department conducted a record number of undercover housing discrimination investigations – 20 percent more than in any other year. In addition, we filed 30 lawsuits alleging unlawful housing discrimination, including the first case developed by our testing program that alleged housing discrimination against Asian Americans. In total during fiscal year 2007, we obtained settlements and judgments in our fair housing and fair lending cases requiring the payment of over \$7 million in civil penalties and monetary damages to victims of discrimination.

On the criminal side, we have been similarly successful in using the Fair Housing Act to protect those who seek to live in their homes free from violence and threats. In the past five years, we have obtained convictions against more than 40 defendants who used burning crosses to intimidate others. We also recently secured convictions against two men who poured mercury onto the front porch and driveway of an interracial couple in an effort to drive them and their young children from their home. Such acts are not to be tolerated in our country.

President Bush has said: “As a Nation, and as individuals, we must be vigilant in responding to discrimination wherever we find it and ensuring that minority families have access to housing.” I commend the dedicated federal employees who work every day to pursue that goal. On this, the fortieth anniversary of the Fair Housing Act, we at the Department of Justice pledge to continue our quest to eradicate housing discrimination in this country.

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