



Remarks of Alice S. Fisher
Assistant Attorney General, Criminal Division
Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force Conference
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Thank you Attorney General for your leadership and for the clear mission you have given us. Your direction has been clear: Make sure we do what we can to see that the money intended for the victims of these disasters get to the intended recipients and to rebuild these communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this effort to rebuild these stricken communities and help the victims of these disasters reclaim their lives.

Each of the people in this room, and many more who are not here, are working tirelessly to protect the integrity of the relief and reconstruction effort. We have pulled together, as a team, to put our best foot forward to deter opportunistic fraud we unfortunately see when millions of dollars flow. The money is flowing from the pockets of charitable citizens and friends, and from the government. More will come. Our job is to make sure that the money is not diverted by criminals.

I want to start by giving our Task Force members a thanks and a congratulations on the success we have already seen from all of your efforts.

A cornerstone of the strategy is to deter fraudulent conduct. Get out in front of the problem. Try to stop it before it happens. Nothing speaks louder to deterrence like swift and certain prosecution. We decided, at the outset, that an aggressive and visible prosecution strategy would likely deter illegal conduct. We have seen over 40 people charged in schemes, from Florida to California. We have investigations going and we are pursuing them aggressively.

This occurred in 6 short weeks because of the commitment of each of the Task Force members who worked together. These cases are investigated by the FBI, Inspector Generals, Postal Inspectors, IRS and state and local law enforcement. The achievement was possible because we banded together.

The Task Force benefits from all of its members. I have seen the U.S. Attorneys in Louisiana, Jim Letten, David Dugas, Donald Washington, and in the neighboring states of Mississippi, Alabama, Texas, rally their troops under difficult circumstances to preserve the integrity of the relief efforts in their districts. The FBI, at the national and local levels, have been working around the clock, striking against those pretending to be Red Cross or charitable organizations, or those impersonating victims and pretending they are entitled to relief. I have witnessed the drive and determination and forward-thinking of the Inspector General community to ensure that the billions of relief dollars needed to make the Gulf Region whole are applied to that purpose and not diverted by fraudsters or corrupt officials. They are engaged in a substantial proactive review to prevent and deter.

The Federal Trade Commission has developed and published flyers warning the public about potential fraud scams. They prepared and published radio advertisements. The United States Postal Inspectors published warnings in newspapers across the U.S. Task Force members have hotlines for the public, websites that link to each other. We are communicating with each other constantly.

General Gonzales-this is good government. We understand our individual strengths but equally appreciate our combined power. We have combined our strength.

In these early days, we have been focusing on charity fraud and false benefit claims. Soon, the opportunities for fraud will increase even more. The pervasive devastation of the affected areas will require billions of dollars for reconstruction. Some will try to cheat the government, and cheat the efforts during the rebuilding. We will be aggressive here too.

We have set up a Joint Command Center to prepare and we will be together to combat this type of procurement fraud and any public corruption. At the Command Center, prosecutors, the FBI, other federal investigators and the Inspectors General will come together and sit side by side to work together. At the Center, we will be . . .

Sharing Information: Developing protocols for intelligence sharing, evidence sharing and looking for trends. We will have a shared database for the investigations and important information.

Sharing Resources: Pooling our minds, analysis and work product to take quick action.

Sharing Results: With each other and the public. We hope the Center will help us continue to deter.

We have begun sharing already and this afternoon, during the conference, we will roll up our sleeves to continue this work.

I am proud to work with those in the audience today. We are privileged to serve the people in the great states of Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Texas and throughout the affected areas. I again thank everyone for their efforts. Bigger challenges lie ahead. We will meet those challenges with the energy we bring to this mission.