



Department of Justice

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PREPARED REMARKS OF ATTORNEY GENERAL ALBERTO R. GONZALES **AT THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT HEARING**

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Good morning, Chairman Sensenbrenner, Ranking Member Conyers, and members of the Committee.

I appreciate this opportunity to discuss a number of issues that are of vital importance to Congress, the Justice Department and the American people.

When I reflect on the 14 months I've served as Attorney General - and the countless ways the Justice Department impacts lives across this great Nation - I am reminded that we have a unique responsibility as stewards of the American Dream...the dream of living and prospering in a safe, secure, and hopeful society. Our record in securing this dream is strong. We have not suffered another terrorist attack here at home, and our Nation's violent crime rate is at its lowest level in more than three decades.

Now, we have to do more. To guide the work of the Department, I have established priorities rooted in the pursuit of the American dream: fight terrorism; combat violent crime, cyber crime, and drug trafficking; protect civil rights; and preserve government and corporate integrity.

In each of these six areas of special emphasis, we have a plan to secure the hopes, opportunities, and cherished values that make our country great.

First, on terrorism, our top priority. The terrorists seek to destroy the American promise of liberty and prosperity. And they are determined to attack us again here at home. Thank you

for your multi-year effort to reauthorize the PATRIOT Act. It was a tough process, but an important one.

We continue to work to prevent another terrorist attack by prosecuting those who might harm Americans. This fight is not easy. Terrorism cases are some of the most difficult to investigate and prosecute, so we've had to adapt our efforts to a new world of changing techniques and technologies. This cutting-edge work has led to many successes.

Last week, Ahmed Omar Abu Ali was sentenced to 30 years in prison for providing support to al Qaeda, conspiring to assassinate President Bush, and conspiring to hijack and destroy commercial airplanes in an attack similar to the attacks of September 11th, 2001. This terrorist will now be behind bars in a federal prison where he can't harm American citizens.

He joins others that the Department has removed from society, such as Richard Reid, the so-called "shoe bomber"; John Walker Lindh, the "American Taliban"; and members of the Virginia Jihad Network.

We've broken up terrorist cells in Portland, Oregon, Brooklyn and Buffalo, New York and recently charged three men in Toledo, Ohio with conspiring to provide material support to terrorists and conspiring to commit acts of terrorism against individuals overseas - including U.S. military personnel serving in Iraq.

In addition, as you know, the Justice Department has been authorized to stand up a National Security Division. This will bring under one umbrella the Department's primary national security elements. This fulfills a key recommendation of the WMD Commission. It's another step in eliminating the infamous "wall" between our intelligence and law enforcement teams.

In addition to our ongoing fight against terrorism, the Justice Department continues to focus on five strategic priorities with a targeted agenda focused on producing results. I thought I would give you a sense of those results over just the past few weeks.

Every American deserves to live free from the fear of violent crime. We remain focused on reducing gun crime and liberating communities from the stranglehold of gang violence.

We're reducing gun crime across the country through the President's Project Safe

Neighborhoods program. The numbers show that this initiative has been very successful. That's probably why most U.S. Attorneys across the country have started to use their PSN programs to target violent gangs operating in their districts.

We've responded with a comprehensive anti-gang strategy that uses the successful PSN model to shut down violent gangs that terrorize our streets and neighborhoods. Nationwide, the strategy focuses on prevention, prosecution, and preparing prisoners for a return to society.

As part of that effort, I was in Los Angeles last week to announce that L.A. is one of six areas that will participate in a pilot project to target anti-gang resources in new and imaginative ways. In addition to L.A., this program will provide \$2.5 million dollars to implement innovative anti-gang solutions in Cleveland; Dallas-Fort Worth; Milwaukee; Tampa; and a gang corridor that stretches from Easton to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia.

When we talk about violence - especially keeping our children safe - we often fear what can happen as they walk to school or play on a ball field. But recent headlines have reminded us that our children also can log onto the Internet and open themselves to new and hidden threats.

The Internet must be safe for all Americans, especially children. I recently announced a major new initiative: Project Safe Childhood. The goal of Project Safe Childhood is to prevent the exploitation of our kids over the Internet - to clean up this new neighborhood just as we've worked to reduce gun crime on our city streets.

U.S. Attorneys in every district will partner with local Internet Crimes Against Children Task Forces and community leaders to develop a strategic plan based on the particular needs of their communities. They will then share resources and information to investigate and prosecute more sexual predators and child pornographers than ever before. And they will coordinate in seeking the stiffest penalties possible.

Two weeks ago, I announced the indictments of 27 people for allegedly participating in a pornographic chat room called "Kiddypics and Kiddyvids." Some participants of the chat room have been charged with using minors to produce images of child pornography and then making those images - including a live show of an adult sexually molesting an infant - available to other members through the Internet.

The Project Safe Childhood initiative will help us target this kind of horrific behavior and

prosecute individuals who harm our children.

Even as advanced technologies help cultivate new dreams, too often those dreams are wiped out by the pitfalls of illegal drug abuse.

No community will fully prosper if drug abuse is rampant. That's why we will continue to dedicate ourselves to dismantling drug trafficking organizations and stopping the spread of illegal drugs.

Just last week, I announced the largest narcotics-trafficking indictment in our history. Fifty members of the Colombian narco-terrorist group FARC have been indicted for allegedly importing more than \$25 billion dollars worth of cocaine into the United States and other countries. The FARC is responsible for overseeing the production of more than 60 percent of the cocaine imported into the U.S.

Several FARC members appear on the Justice Department's Consolidated Priority Organization Target, or CPOT, List - which identifies the most dangerous international drug-trafficking organizations. The list was created at the beginning of this Administration to ensure that drug enforcement resources were directed in the most productive fashion possible. Last year, we dismantled six of these "CPOT" organizations and disrupted the operations of six more.

We're also continuing and expanding our work to combat the spread of methamphetamine across the Nation. Thank you for passing the Combat Methamphetamine Epidemic Act which provides law enforcement with additional tools to disrupt the production and trafficking of meth. Law enforcement has done a good job of shutting down small meth labs here in the United States. But production continues in Super Labs outside of our borders - especially in Mexico - and the finished product comes back to the United States through illegal drug trafficking routes.

We are working with our counterparts in Mexico to address the production and trafficking of methamphetamine - including providing training and equipment to law enforcement teams across the border.

Forty years ago, the color of your skin was as much of an obstacle to the American dream as violent gangs, sexual predators, and drug dealers are today. We've come a long way from that brand of state-sponsored racism, but we must continue to safeguard the civil rights that are fundamental to the opportunities we cherish in this country.

All Americans should have the same chance to pursue their dreams. We will continue to aggressively combat discrimination wherever it is found. I am pleased that the Department prosecuted a record number of criminal civil rights cases in the last two-year period.

This year, we've begun Operation Home Sweet Home. Under this initiative, we will bring the number of targeted investigations under the Fair Housing Act testing program to an all-time high, ensuring the rights of all Americans to obtain housing fairly. We're also anxious to renew our commitment to the fundamental right to vote, by working with Congress to reauthorize the Voting Rights Act.

Lastly, human trafficking has emerged as one of the foremost civil rights issues of our day. Three weeks ago, I was in Chicago to announce the release of a report detailing the Justice Department's efforts to halt this pernicious evil. There is no place in our compassionate society for these peddlers of broken dreams. President Bush has pledged his support for this effort, and I've made it a high priority at the Justice Department.

Millions of people come to America every year to pursue the American dream because of the rights and liberties we've guaranteed for generations. And our government and economy are the envy of billions more because we have systems that are open, honest, fair, and dependable.

Integrity in government and business is essential for a strong America...taxpayers and investors deserve nothing less. That's why we will investigate and prosecute corruption wherever we find it, and we will preserve the integrity of our public institutions and corporations.

This list of priorities is not exclusive. We have other responsibilities that are no less important to the American dream.

For instance, enforcing our immigration laws will help us remain an open and welcoming

society, by cracking down on illegal activity and closing our borders to criminals and terrorists. The President has called for comprehensive immigration reform policy that is based upon law and reflects our deep desire to be a compassionate and decent Nation. I join him in urging Congress to take action that makes sense for everyone in America.

And a tough and fair sentencing system will give teeth to our enforcement objectives, improve our deterrence efforts, and ensure that every American is treated fairly before the bar of justice. Before the Supreme Court's decision in *United States v. Booker*, the Sentencing Reform Act and the mandatory Sentencing Guidelines were designed to generate similar sentences for defendants who commit similar crimes and have similar criminal records. There is a clear danger that the gains we have made in reducing crime and achieving fair and consistent sentencing will be significantly compromised if mandatory sentencing laws are not reinstated in the federal criminal justice system.

In these strategic areas and many more, we are working hard to protect and preserve the American Dream. Crime is down. Drug use is declining. Our Nation is more secure today than ever before.

We can be proud, but not complacent. I appreciate your partnership as we strive to build upon the vital role of the Justice Department in securing this dream for future generations.

Thank you.

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