



Department of Justice

FOR RELEASE
2:00 P.M. EST
MARCH 13, 1989

WELCOMING REMARKS

BY

THE HONORABLE DICK THORNBURGH
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

TO THE

WASHINGTON INSTITUTE
OF THE
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JEWISH WOMEN

MONDAY, MARCH 13, 1989

GREAT HALL
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
WASHINGTON, D.C.

It's a great pleasure to welcome you to the Department of Justice and to invite you to share our work through your involvement as concerned citizens and members of the National Council of Jewish Women. I hope your visit will be as rewarding for each of you, as it is for us, since your presence here today helps remind us that our work is based not only on principle, but on service to people.

We seek to serve for those people who need our help in order that they be afforded the justice guaranteed them by our Constitution and by our Maker. And we need to work against those people who would deny these rights to their fellow citizens. The success of our work depends obviously upon people within government but also depends upon the strength of people throughout this nation -- solid, dependable, fair people -- who stand beside us and contribute in their own ways to this pursuit.

Our mutual pursuit is symbolized in this room and by this building, and by your presence here today.

Observe, for example, the symbol on my right. She is the Spirit of Justice and she stands upon clouds which rest on tablets of the laws given to Moses. This symbol represents not only our respect for the idea of justice, but our faith in the divinity of the concept of American justice and commitment to its application.

But as with all great commitments to great ideals, success does not come easily. Just when we feel we have won out against age-old challenges, new challenges move to the fore to threaten our freedoms and our lives, or old challenges re-emerge in different guises to frustrate our progress.

Challenges today can be as direct as the life and death struggle that we wage against drugs. This struggle is played out every day, here, on the streets of the nation's capital, and on the streets of cities and towns across this country. Drugs are an insidious and violent challenge to justice which pits each of us against those who place greed and absolute self-interest above everything that we hold honorable and sacred...including human life.

The horrible toll that this tragedy takes gives this challenge a great and particular urgency. Every day lives are lost because of drugs. Every day healthy minds are wasted because of drugs. Every day babies are born sick and dying because of drugs. And every day, as a society and as a nation, we suffer...because of drugs.

So the challenge is clear. There will be no justice in America until America's communities are safe from the violence of drug dealers; and until America's children are safe from the trafficker's deadly wares. But that goal will only be realized if, as a government and as a society, we stand united to meet this challenge.

It is a priority of this Administration and of this Justice Department to fight, at every level, what President Bush has properly called the "scourge" of drugs.

- Through law enforcement -- by arresting, prosecuting, and imprisoning those who deal in drugs, from the drug kingpins at the top, all the way down to the dealers on the streets.

- Through interdiction -- by seizing and destroying every bit of cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and illegal chemicals we can find.

- Through rehabilitation -- by helping those who are addicted to drugs to lead more healthy, productive lives.

- And through education -- by teaching the youngest generation of Americans that the use of drugs is not only stupid, but dangerous and deadly as well.

But as that is our priority here, in Washington, it must also be your priority and a priority for all Americans. Because no matter how much money we spend, or how many pushers we arrest, or how much cocaine or heroin or marijuana we seize...as long as there are those who want drugs and, as importantly, as long as there are those who will tolerate drug use by their fellow citizens -- be they friends or strangers -- we will not be able to meet this challenge.

Ridding this nation of illegal drugs is by no means the only challenge we face as a Department or as a nation. There are the challenges of painful discrimination which would deprive Americans of their civil rights. There are the challenges of religious bigotry and hatred which through violence and the desecration of religious property would frighten and intimidate those who seek to exercise their faith in the worship of the Lord our God. And there are the challenges of sophisticated white collar crime and public corruption which seek to erode the very integrity and credibility of our government and public sector institutions.

And today we face new challenges never dreamed of by this generation, against freedoms we had long thought secure and inviolable. We find our First Amendment Rights in jeopardy today through threats of death and violence made against Americans who would publish and sell us books. These threats imperil our right to a free press and challenge our rights to free speech and to the free exercise of our faith and religious principles in ways which go to the very heart of the values we treasure in a free society.

These illustrate vividly the breadth of our job and how our work here at the Department of Justice is never done. It illustrates too, how, as Americans, we can never rest in our vigilance to maintain our rights and our freedom.

But these are your challenges too. In particular, we need your support and participation in the fight against drugs.

We are engaged in a war. But it is a war that will only be won, conclusively, when we are victorious on the field of values.

In our struggle for the soul of the next generation, we will prevail only when drugs go out of fashion.

- When the yuppie on the move no longer thinks it's hip to score from the corner supplier on his lunch hour.

- When drug-using rock stars and athletes cease being popular idols.

- And, when in inner-city schools, the dealer with his gold chains and flashy car becomes an outcast rather than a role model for impressionable kids.

This struggle will not be decided in the courtroom, but in the classroom, in the family, and in the community -- because it is not a struggle over laws, but over values. The values of self-respect and self-reliance, and above all, the integrity of the individual mind and spirit to function as God designed them to function.

Our goal is straightforward. It is an America -- and a world -- where "pot" once again means a useful cooking utensil, where "crack" is the sound of a baseball hitting a bat, where "grass" is something to mow, not to smoke, and where "heroin(e)" means a Helen Keller, a Christa McAuliffe, or a Sandra Day O'Connor.

Each of you are a part of the grand team of Americans involved in the struggle to reach this goal and in the work to achieve justice.

The spirit that I ask you to bring to waging, and finally winning, our on-going struggle for justice in America reflects that which is inscribed on this building: "Justice in the life and conduct of the state is possible only as first it resides in the hearts and souls of the citizens."

That is the key to the success of this government and to our success as a free nation in seeking to assure justice. As an organization, and as Americans who are willing to be concerned and to be involved, you are a vital part of this effort.

Thank you very much.