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REMARKS BY
THE HONORABLE JANET RENO,
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE THE
NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR VICTIM ASSISTANCE
THE FOURTEENTH ANNUAL
NATIONAL FORUM ON VICTIM RIGHTS

Friday, April 22, 1994

Dirksen Senate Office Building
Room 106
Washington, D.C.

1 PROCEEDINGS

2 (9:56 a.m.)

3 INTRODUCTION OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

4 THE HONORABLE LAURIE ROBINSON,

5 ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL-DESIGNATE

6 OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS,

7 UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

8 MS. ROBINSON: I am very pleased to be here
9 today. I have had the opportunity over a number of years
10 to work with NOVA and the contributions that NOVA has made
11 through Marlene and John and the board and the staff are
12 truly tremendous, and I really salute them.

13 I had the opportunity I think it was over a
14 decade ago to participate in one of the first National
15 Victim Rights Week events with Frank Carington and others
16 up here on Capitol Hill in the early eighties. And it's
17 very exciting to me about what great strides have been in
18 the victim's movement since that time.

19 It gives me great pleasure to introduce the next
20 speaker, Janet Reno. As many of you know, she has been a
21 committed advocate on behalf of crime victims throughout
22 her career, and long before this issue was a popular one
23 among many public officials and criminal justice
24 professionals.

25 During her 15 years as State's Attorney in

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1 Miami, she did a great deal for victims of crime, not
2 because it was popular but because she saw it as the right
3 thing to do.

4 Let me mention a few examples of that. In
5 Miami, she established a domestic crimes unit that
6 investigated and prosecuted cases of domestic violence and
7 worked closely with the victim assistance unit.

8 She was instrumental in establishing a
9 children's center program housed in the prosecutor's
10 office that featured special interviewing rooms, child
11 sized furniture, two-way mirrors, and camera's to record
12 children's testimony.

13 And as I think many of you know, she was awarded
14 the Florida Network of Victim-Witness Services James
15 Fogarty Award in recognition of her staunch support of
16 services and advocacy for crime victims.

17 Under her leadership the Justice Department is
18 forging a strong partnership with other Federal Agencies,
19 State and local governments, and private organizations to
20 address the Nation's crime problems in the most
21 comprehensive and effective way possible.

22 The goals of this partnership are to fight
23 crime, to protect innocent victims, and to ensure that
24 victims are not lost in the complexities of our criminal
25 justice system.

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1 Janet Reno has been in Washington for about a
2 year and a month, and during that time she has brought new
3 perspectives and new approaches to the Department of
4 Justice.

5 I just want to give you one small illustration
6 of that. Back in November, she came over to the Office of
7 Justice Programs and spent almost 2 hours in a brown-bag
8 informal lunch with the staff members of the Office for
9 Victims of Crime to talk about the work of the office, to
10 explore new initiatives, and to hear from them about their
11 ideas on what more the Department can do to help the cause
12 of crime victims. I think that is an extraordinary kind
13 of commitment on behalf of an attorney general.

14 Janet Reno understands victims issues. She is
15 committed to this cause. As Attorney General, she has
16 made victim services an integral part of the Department's
17 agenda.

18 I hope you will join me in welcoming Janet Reno,
19 the Attorney General of the United States.

20 (Applause.)

21 THE HONORABLE JANET RENO,
22 ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
23 PRESENTATION OF FEDERAL CRIME
24 VICTIMS FUND AWARDS

25 GENERAL RENO: Thank you very much. It is so

1 nice to have such a warm welcome in this particular room.
2 Last time I was in this room was in March 1993 during my
3 confirmation hearings. I do not think I have ever really
4 looked at it before.

5 (Laughter.)

6 GENERAL RENO: It is such a pleasure to be here
7 with NOVA representatives, with people who have been on
8 the front line of developing a Nation's response to
9 victims, of developing and changing a Nation's attitude
10 about victims and victimization.

11 I have worked with so many of your colleagues in
12 Miami over the years. I've watched the change. And you
13 are to me truly the heros and heroines of the criminal
14 justice system. You have achieved so much, and it is an
15 incredible testimony to what people can do when they care
16 and when they continue to fight for what's right,
17 regardless of the consequences.

18 I think it's helpful to think about the victims
19 movement and to put ourselves in some perspective, because
20 too often we get caught up in what's happening at the
21 moment and forget to look back at where we've come from
22 and what we can learn in the course of our progress.

23 The victims movement began to gather grassroots
24 support during the sixties and seventies, with victims
25 reaching out to help other victims.

1 I remember working in the House Judiciary
2 Committee in the Florida House of Representatives when we
3 first started receiving information concerning victims
4 legislation in the early seventies.

5 I then came back to the prosecutor's office in
6 Dade County as an Assistant State Attorney and watched and
7 participated in the development of the rape treatment
8 center in Miami. It seemed like a novel, new idea at the
9 time. And now I look at the facility as I left Dade
10 County, a modern facility, still struggling to address new
11 issues, still struggling to address the issues involving
12 AIDS, still struggling to look at the problems of child
13 abuse as it has exploded in terms of numbers over the
14 years, but right there on the front line, but now an
15 accepted institution because of people like you who cared
16 and made a difference, because of people like Dorothy
17 Hicks who never gave up, who continued to fight year after
18 year for this cause.

19 Rape victims and their advocates worked to
20 crystalize a national awareness based on these community
21 developments. It was fascinating to see what people could
22 do in community, and then watch the network begin to
23 expand throughout the Nation.

24 And it was exciting to talk to prosecutors in
25 other areas. They were developing something similar. And

1 we began to realize that there was an electricity around
2 the Nation generated by people who cared in the community.

3

4 We then understood that we had to go to
5 legislatures around the Nation and not just talk about
6 introducing bills but getting bills passed and getting new
7 ideas developed both in the courts, in police agencies, in
8 the development of sexual battery units in police
9 agencies, in developing police officers' sensitivities.
10 You could again feel the electricity around the Nation.

11 From the beginnings of the victims movement to
12 today many minds and laws have been changed. 42 States
13 now have legislated a bill of rights for victims, and 14
14 States have passed State constitutional amendments for
15 victims rights.

16 But one of the areas where I have felt the
17 movement to be slowest was in the area of domestic
18 violence. When I took office 1978, as some of you know,
19 we did a study of who had been killed in Dade County in
20 the last 25 years by going to our medical examiner's
21 office. We found in the study we did that first year that
22 40 percent of the homicides were somehow related to
23 domestic violence -- husband and wife, boyfriend and
24 girlfriend, ex-spouse.

25 We applied for an old LEAA grant and got monies

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1 to develop the domestic intervention program. People
2 looked at me like I was crazy. Judges said, Janet, that's
3 just a domestic. Police officers said, that's just a
4 domestic.

5 It was sometimes like trying to push against a
6 bulldozer that was coming at you full force, but you kept
7 trying. Sometimes it was the victim themselves who came
8 into your office saying, how can you be so cruel as to
9 refuse to drop these charges? And it required us to sit
10 down with those victims and let them know how important it
11 was to begin to break the cycle of violence.

12 So many of us who were involved in that effort
13 sensed in our gut how important it was. We began to
14 develop the statistics, such as we had from the medical
15 examiner's office, but we were reaching out and wanting
16 more statistics to show how it was a cycle of violence
17 handed down from one generation to the next.

18 And it began to be exciting -- slower sometimes
19 than in response to rape, but slowly the momentum began to
20 build, slowly legislation was passed, slowly I began to go
21 to court after court where the judges were sensitive to
22 the whole problem of domestic violence and understood what
23 we were trying to do.

24 Then we saw the gender bias commission in
25 Florida take hold and develop initiatives that made clear

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1 to the courts that they were going to have to change their
2 attitude.

3 Sometimes it was not out of compassion for
4 victims that caused people to change attitudes. Police
5 departments began to get sued by victims who had not been
6 properly assisted. And you thought, gee whiz, why does it
7 have to happen that way? But, again, through whatever
8 force was brought to bear, slowly the engine began to move
9 so that now -- about 3 weeks ago when I went to Iowa and
10 we were linked with 15 Iowa communities, large and small,
11 some rural, I was amazed find that groups in those
12 communities who were linked with this fiber optic system
13 -- I would say about 8 out of the 15 listed domestic
14 violence as one of their first priorities, and wanted to
15 know what could be done and how we could respond, and how
16 we could assist and support this effort.

17 It is happening, but it again is an indication
18 of how dedicated so many people around this country are to
19 keep trying, never give up, suffer defeat at the
20 legislature, come back again, have a police officer look
21 at you like you're crazy, and then see a police officer in
22 a safe streets unit who understands the problem reach out
23 and start becoming your messenger for other police
24 agencies.

25 Sometimes it's two steps forward, three steps

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1 back, but this engine is beginning to move ahead. With
2 the common recognition, as I said to the assembled
3 Judiciary Committee in this room, unless we start focusing
4 on domestic violence, unless we end violence in the home,
5 we are never going to end violence in the streets and in
6 the communities of America. We have got to start there.

7 When we look at the whole issue of
8 victimization, we have got to understand that
9 victimization in the family is what is really pulling the
10 family apart in America, and if we are going to begin to
11 address the problems as a whole, we have got to begin
12 there.

13 The theme of this forum is facing violence
14 today, fewer victims tomorrow. If we come face-to-face
15 with the most frequent form of violence in America today,
16 domestic violence, which according to the FBI occurs ever
17 15 seconds in this Nation, that is when we are going to
18 begin to make a difference.

19 And if we apply the whole force and theory of
20 the victims movement to that issue and not just handle it
21 in the old traditional criminal justice way of prosecuting
22 but remember that we all have a responsibility beyond
23 conviction to do something that will make a difference to
24 interrupt the cycle of violence, whether it be counseling,
25 or intervention, or mediation, or prison that we've got to

1 design the programs that break the cycle of violence.

2 But I think of the most troubling aspects of
3 violence today, as we face it in its different forms, is
4 the recognition that violence is down in many American
5 communities -- not much in some, but it's down in many.

6 But what is up is a new and terrifying form of
7 violence, youth violence, which I think is the greatest
8 single crime problem in America today, a violence that is
9 causing a victimization that is tragic because the victims
10 of this youth violence are children and young people
11 themselves. And you can see it as a part of a
12 disintegration of community. We have got to focus on this
13 issue.

14 At Thanksgiving time I went to the Washington
15 Hospital Center, which has one of the most modern and up-
16 to-date trauma units in the country. I went to talk about
17 health care as it related to violence. Through that
18 Sunday morning after Thanksgiving I walked through room
19 after room -- gunshots, knives, young people, young
20 people, young people.

21 The nurses, the doctors who attended these
22 people during the course of that night before told me that
23 the perpetrators, the friends, would oftentimes be there
24 beginning to come together or fight again, but oftentimes
25 the victim would be the perpetrator the next time, and

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1 they would see the roles reversed. And they realized how
2 important it was to begin to go to the community and get
3 to these victims now, get to the perpetrators now, before
4 we begin to just repeat the cycle.

5 What they had done was to take research monies
6 and go to the schools served by that hospital, to the
7 schools to develop conflict resolution programs in the
8 elementary schools, to evaluate those programs in a solid,
9 scientific way, and to teach people to resolve their
10 conflicts without knives and guns and fists, because the
11 problem that we see in America today is that victimization
12 of children by children in America is increasing.

13 And because of the youth of these children, many
14 of these cases are not getting into the criminal justice
15 system. They are being resolved in the schools. They are
16 being handled in the schools. We have got to deal with
17 the issue of victimization, to give that youngster who is
18 the victim of a mugging at 11 the strength to go forward,
19 the counseling to overcome it.

20 How many children have you dealt with over these
21 last 2 or 3 years who are traumatized, who are fearful,
22 who are beginning to have ever ounce of self-confidence
23 they have ever had eroded, who fear to walk home from
24 school? We have got to look at the problem of victims as
25 a problem of community.

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1 We have a historic opportunity in America. When
2 I was in this room a little over a year ago they hadn't
3 focused, I guess, too much on prevention and what I was
4 saying about prevention, but I said the same thing then as
5 I have said in the year that has gone by, that we will
6 never be able to build enough prisons if we wait until a
7 child is 18 and 19, that we will not have a work force
8 with the skills necessary to fill the jobs, to maintain
9 America as a first-rate Nation unless we start making an
10 investment in children, family, and community.

11 We must focus on that effort in terms of victims
12 as well, and understand that we have got to reweave the
13 fabric of society around victims -- victims in the
14 community, victims in terms of giving them the assurance,
15 the self-confidence, the feeling of safety.

16 We have a golden opportunity now. Yesterday,
17 something historic happened. The Congress, the House of
18 Representatives of the United States passed a crime bill
19 that is thoughtful, it is balanced, it has got punishment,
20 lots of punishment, it has got policing, a provision for
21 50,000 police officers, and the Senate bill has 100,000
22 police officers in it, and prevention -- something that
23 makes common sense in terms of how we fight crime,
24 something that doesn't talk in 30-second sound bites,
25 something that gets to the root of the problem while

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1 letting people know that there is no excuse for hurting
2 other people, and that there are going to be swift and
3 certain sanctions.

4 We've got to galvanize together to make sure
5 that that bill goes to conference, comes out of
6 conference, and gets passed by the Memorial Day weekend
7 I have just come from a meeting with the President and the
8 House and Senate leadership. We are committed to that
9 effort, and we need everybody to join together, to
10 eliminate partisan politics from the dispute about crime,
11 and get to common sense solutions that are well thought
12 out and that will have an impact.

13 So much of that comes back to community, to
14 community policing, to bringing community police officers
15 together with the neighborhood to identify the priorities,
16 to identify that fragile victim who has just come home
17 from the hospital, to identify that wife who has been the
18 battered spouse, to teach them how to begin to break up
19 the cycle of violence within the community, how to respond
20 to that youngster who has been the victim of a stabbing,
21 how to bring that child back into the community with a
22 sense of self-confidence.

23 There is so much that we can do if we understand
24 that people can do so much themselves if they are only
25 given half a fighting chance up front.

1 We support that effort, but it costs money. And
2 I want to talk with you today about a hard issue to deal
3 with -- dollars, how we support the crime victims movement
4 in America.

5 Our tax dollars go for an astounding diversity
6 of things, things essential to a civilized society and
7 that add to the quality of our life. But one of the
8 realities we face in Washington is that we're going to
9 have to do more with less.

10 We're having to address the issue of the
11 deficit. We have a shrinking Federal Government. We are
12 having to address the issue of violence. But we cannot in
13 the process forget crime victims, and very few of our
14 dollars go to assist the innocent victims of crime.

15 The Federal program for crime victims managed by
16 the Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crimes
17 are supported not by tax dollars but by monies from the
18 Crime Victims Fund. The fund is made up of monies
19 collected from criminals convicted of Federal offenses,
20 monies collected in the form of fines, forfeited bail
21 bonds, penalty fees, and special assessments.

22 I have announced to my staff that one of the
23 priorities of our office is fine collection. It's easier
24 said than done. I've dealt with it in a very local area,
25 in Miami, and I understand what the problems are.

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1 But if we get ourselves in gear, as we are
2 proceeding to do in the Department of Justice, if we
3 develop a real network with the U.S. Attorneys and support
4 them every step of the way, if we develop the computers
5 and the infrastructure necessary to do it the right way,
6 if we bring modern techniques of collection to the process
7 and do it right, we are committed and we are going to do
8 everything that we can to increase the collections in
9 those funds because it is critical to the support of the
10 victims movement.

11 The fund is a relatively small source of
12 revenues, especially when compared to the huge budget
13 allocations designated for many other national priorities
14 Last year, in fiscal year 1993, the fund received deposits
15 of \$144.7 million. Of this, \$6.2 million went to the U.S.
16 courts, leaving \$138.5 million to assist victims across
17 the Nation.

18 Now, if you had told me about 18 months ago
19 those dollar figures I would have said, wow, what a lot of
20 money. Having now had to deal with a budget in the
21 billions, it's not much.

22 Fund deposits for this year promise to equal or
23 exceed last year's total. As of the end of March over \$78
24 million has been deposited in the fund with 6 months
25 remaining in the fiscal year.

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1 The Crime Victims Fund, even in the years of its
2 highest deposits, contains only a fraction of the amount
3 that victims lose each year in violent crime. The
4 Department's national crime victimization survey found
5 that 23 percent of all U.S. households experienced a crime
6 during 1992, losing over \$17.6 billion in direct costs as
7 a result of crime.

8 Nonetheless, the fund is truly a precious
9 treasure for the lifeline it extends to thousands of
10 victims whose lives have been shattered by violent crime.

11 But this raises another issue that we have to
12 address because sometimes there are competing interests
13 between restitution and fines, arguing that fines go to
14 the Crime Victims Trust Fund to help victims. We've got
15 to work together in NOVA and the Department of Justice to
16 design a strategy that makes sure that restitution, which
17 can be such an effective, important tool, is balanced with
18 the need and the support of the Crime Victims Trust Fund,
19 and that we do it the right way with one ultimate goal --
20 how do we best protect the victim?

21 (Applause.)

22 GENERAL RENO: Approximately 90 percent of each
23 year's deposits are returned to the States in the form of
24 victim assistance and compensation grants which are used
25 by the States to support direct services to victims of

1 crime .

2 These services treat the most personal and
3 deeply painful of wounds, psychological counseling for a
4 child to heal from the trauma of being physically abused,
5 support for battered women's shelters, to provide safe
6 havens where abused mothers and their children can take
7 refuge, and money to pay the doctor's bill and basic
8 living expense when work must be missed, and even funeral
9 costs in the wake of a sudden, unexpected death by
10 violence .

11 We have got to do everything that we can to
12 enhance this effort. Too often the system responds, it
13 does it right, somebody comes to court, they have their
14 deposition taken, they appear, they testify, they see a
15 conviction, and they leave without having had the basic,
16 deepest problems addressed. 6 months down the line they
17 are still in crisis. They have lost their job. They are
18 suffering from depression .

19 So much of this could have been avoided if we
20 had had somebody right on the scene when the crime first
21 happened, who could follow them through the process, not
22 handing them off to the next person and to the next
23 person, but an advocate with them from the night it
24 happened telling them what to expect, what an information
25 was, what an indictment was, when was the motion to

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1 suppress going to be heard, keeping them advised .

2 Every time I've seen victim efforts work, it's
3 been when they've come first, when they've been
4 comprehensive, when they've identified with one person and
5 made a difference throughout the process. Down the road
6 costly counseling can be avoided by a helping hand the
7 moment it occurs.

8 Fund monies also go to sensitize the
9 professionals who deal with crime victims, to the terrible
10 impact crime has on victims and to help those
11 professionals improve the quality and breadth of services
12 they provide to victims .

13 It is amazing to me the number of caring people
14 in the criminal justice system who still do not understand
15 victimization. I don't think that you can fully
16 understand it unless you've been a victim. And so many
17 wonderful victims or survivors have now become involved in
18 the system, and through the fact that they have walked in
19 victim's shoes they have been so helpful .

20 But more importantly, they have been helpful to
21 the police officer, to that prosecutor who has just gotten
22 out of law school and thinks he's great . He is great. He
23 is a wonderful prosecutor but he doesn't know anything
24 about victimization .

25 And this 55-year-old lady who has been through

1 hell and her stepson and stepdaughter have been killed,
2 after 5 years has the perspective, the understanding, has
3 coped with the pain and can sit down and say, now, Jim,
4 this is the way it's got to be.

5 When you can get more people like that funded
6 and involved in the system, you can make such an
7 incredible difference.

8 The fund supports training for police on how to
9 extend the blanket of safety and security to a victim as
10 they arrive at a crime scene, and supports training for
11 the clergy how best for them to carry out support that can
12 aid the healing process.

13 It has always been amazing to me to have members
14 of the clergy come to our courts not ever having known how
15 to deal, what to do when a member of their congregation
16 has been injured as a result of a crime, and walking away
17 saying thank you, you have taught us so much. We should
18 be expanding our efforts in theology schools around the
19 country.

20 The fund also supports services to victims of
21 Federal crimes, including a grant program that funds
22 victim assistance programs in remote Indian sections of
23 the country where such services are scarce or nonexistent,
24 and an emergency services fund that enables U S. Attorneys
25 to meet the critical needs of victims of violent crime

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1 when local services are unavailable.

2 Ladies and gentlemen, one of the great
3 miscarriages of justice in America is how our Government
4 over time has treated the American Indian. There are
5 great areas in the country of Indian reservations with
6 proud and wonderful people on those lands, people that
7 have a history and a tradition that exceeds any of ours.

8 I am committed to doing everything I can to
9 support them, to address the issues of victimization, to
10 work sensitively with tribes and their different tribal
11 practices to make sure that the American Indian is
12 represented in our efforts to do something to truly
13 support victims.

14 At the same time, we announced about 3 months
15 ago an antiviolenace initiative. People have said the
16 Federal Government shouldn't really be addressing
17 violence, that's a State and local problem. But all I had
18 to do was to take office and go first to Los Angeles, then
19 to Salt Lake City, then to Omaha, Wichita, and you can
20 watch the crime patterns come sweeping across the country.

21 Crime is no longer just a State and local
22 problem. Violent crime cuts across this Nation.
23 Trafficking units and organizations sweep up across State
24 lines. Youth gangs come sweeping up from Los Angeles to
25 Salt Lake City.

1 If the Federal Government can be involved in a
2 right and proper way, not taking credit from the State but
3 working together with State and local officials to do
4 what's right in the best interest of the case, I think we
5 can add a whole new dimension and resource to the fight
6 against violence. But it will mean an ever increasing
7 number of victims in the Federal criminal justice system,
8 and we must be prepared to meet that need.

9 Let us learn from victims themselves what this
10 support can mean. What do victim compensation payments
11 mean to the robbery victim who was beaten so brutally that
12 he had to spend weeks recovering in the hospital? Quote,
13 "I have sleepless nights and I live in fear of being
14 attacked every time I come in public. I am currently
15 being called by collection agencies to settle portions of
16 my hospital bills not covered by my insurance carrier,
17 Now I am being threatened to be taken to court, and my
18 name and credit ruined."

19 Nothing angers me as much. I have had more
20 telephone battles with people like that collection agency
21 than almost anything else in my victims efforts. We've
22 got to put them in the position of not ever having to be
23 demeaned in the first place by even one of the first calls
24 for such an effort.

25 What do victim assistance counseling services

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