



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

PRESS CONFERENCE

HON. JANET RENO, ATTORNEY GENERAL

Thursday, March 25, 1999

9:27 a.m.

P R O C E E D I N G S

(9:27 a.m.)

VOICES: Good morning.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Good morning.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, with U.N. and NATO forces engaged overseas, I guess the natural question to ask is whether we have increased security here at home?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We are taking responsible precautions.

QUESTION: Has there been some increase of the --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment on what is being done.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, the Chairman of Microsoft, Bill Gates, has said publicly that his company has sent the Justice Department a settlement proposal, picking up on the judge's advice to the parties before the recess, that they use their time wisely. Has the Justice Department received a settlement offer from Microsoft?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think the best thing to do is to let the lawyers who are directly involved comment.

QUESTION: So, if we ask the Antitrust Division, will they say something?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I do not know whether they will say something, but --

QUESTION: Would you like them to?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: But Myron will be happy to work with you.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: Getting back to Kosovo for a minute. Have you been involved at all in any of the discussions about the legality of the operation?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We were consulted, and we advised the National Security Council that what the President proposed to do was constitutionally and otherwise lawfully authorized.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, have there been any specific terrorist threats leveled in the U.S. or against our embassies in Europe since this campaign has started?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment. Whether or not there were such threats, I think the State Department should take appropriate steps in that regard, and would refer any matter like that to the State Department. And with respect to any other threats, that would be best handled through the FBI.

QUESTION: Are concerns running at a heightened level now because of --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Again, any comments that should be made, should be made through the FBI.

QUESTION: Picking up on Beverley's questions about the legality, did the Justice Department look at all at the question of whether NATO needs to have the U.N. sign off on NATO operations? Did you look at any of those sorts of questions?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We looked at what the President of the United States was constitutionally authorized to do.

QUESTION: Who handled that in the department?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: The Office of Legal Counsel.

QUESTION: Is it something on paper that you all sent over there?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We were consulted.

QUESTION: Yesterday's ruling in Britain about Mr. Pinochet, did that have any impact on your review of the situation with regard to him in this country?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We are looking at all of the issues and trying to understand what that ruling was. And then we will make an appropriate determination.

QUESTION: Can you be more specific about what your review is focused on, whether it's the facts of the law or both?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What we want to do is look at the determination by the House of Lords, make a determination as to how that might impact on our issue. But what we are faced with is a situation that occurred here in the United States. And if there is a basis for holding someone accountable, whoever it might be, we would like to proceed in every possible way to do that. But we need to look at what the House of Lords has concluded, and then we have got to pursue an investigation that is still ongoing.

QUESTION: Do you think -- this is probably going to fall into the category of "what if," but -- the House of Lords

ruling, apparently they decided that, in Britain, he would not be responsible for any acts that occurred prior to Britain signing this treaty. Do you think that would hold true in this country, as well?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Those are the issues that we are reviewing.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, can you give us any update on your discussions with Judge Starr, at what point they are now, or whether you seem to be leaning toward getting some outside, respected authority to conduct the inquiry?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I cannot comment.

QUESTION: Can you comment at all on the Bakaly matter, referred to you by Judge Starr?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, can you tell us about your meeting this week with people who are concerned about police conduct? Is there going to be any follow-on to that? What will be the upshot of it?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We have heard from civil rights leaders who are concerned, and we have shared our concern with them. We are hearing from law enforcement officials today, and discussing how we can address this concern.

I think the clear issue is policing has been of great benefit to this country, in terms of public safety, and as we have developed community policing, police have, in many instances, become the glue that brings a community together, as opposed to splitting it apart. Good community police officers have reached out to young people and, instead of developing suspicion against police, have been responsible for becoming their mentors, becoming people who give them guidance and support in the community.

Community policing has been important in terms of building trust with the community that produces information that

solves crimes. We have seen the results of this effort in so many communities across America, where police and schools and private citizens are working together to solve the community's problems.

At the same time, there are a few police officers who exercise their authority in a way that is not justified by the law or by any other circumstance. And it is important that we speak out and say that that cannot be tolerated, that we must work together to perfect policing. Because the police officer is the person that most personifies government authority in the eyes of the individual person in their daily life. And we must make that personification of authority an image that is fair, that is firm, that is just, that is understanding, and that is compassionate.

And we have a lot of good examples to draw upon. But we have got to make clear that excessive force -- not justified by the law or the circumstances -- and abusive authority will not be tolerated.

QUESTION: Will you be going to New York as some of the leaders requested?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We are reviewing what we should do, consistent with the ongoing investigation, to speak out where appropriate, but to make sure that justice is done in terms of the investigation and in terms of whatever results are from the investigation.

QUESTION: And what is your hope that will come out of these meetings today? What is the agenda?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I want to hear from the people who have been so responsible for making law enforcement so effective, from the point of view of building trust in the community, of solving problems in the community -- not just reducing crime, but solving community problems. Because I think they have done so much to bring policing into the next century, in terms of effectiveness and trust. And I want to hear from them as to their suggestions about what we can do to enhance that trust.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, can we categorize your review in New York as a pattern and practice investigation of the City Police Department?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Well, you have got different situations. You have a pending prosecution in the Eastern District, on the Louima case. You have an investigation to determine whether there was criminal wrongdoing underway by the Bronx D.A., with the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York -- that is, Manhattan -- working with them and pursuing that to determine what should be done. And then you have the pattern and practice investigation that had been originally originated in the Eastern District.

The Southern District is now pursuing the issue of pattern and practice with respect to a widened authority. And I would ask Myron to give you the full context of it.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, just a quick follow-up if I may. Kwasi Mfume this week mentioned the concern about the possibility of civil unrest. How concerned are you that people in some of these communities are very, very concerned about some of these allegations of wrongdoing?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think it is very important to make sure that we do everything we can to be sensitive to this issue. But it is important to recognize that civil unrest does not help the situation; that what we must do is, in an orderly way, conduct the investigations so that they are done the right way. We must figure out what we can do to enhance good policing in this country that is so vitally important in so many different ways.

And we must work together to make sure that we know the best ways, and that we implement the best ways, for uncovering any abuse of authority on the part of the limited number of police officers involved in that type of activity; and that we take appropriate steps when that abuse of authority has been identified, to see that it is corrected and that it is never done again.

QUESTION: Do you think Mayor Giuliani has created more problems in terms of civil unrest by his apparently intolerant comments about the Diallo matter.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not make any comment. I just think it is important that we look to see what can be done to get the best possible policing in this country, with the best possible policing being police officers who work with the community to identify problems, to solve those problems, and do it fairly, so that the public has confidence in them.

QUESTION: But you always talk about how important it is for the community to work together. This is the political leader of the community who seems to be going in a different direction.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment on the specifics. I think it is important for us to comment on what has happened in this country in terms of good policing and how important it is to ferret out those that violate that spirit.

QUESTION: You talk about community policing in kind of touchy-feely terms. But I think, in New York -- and they have bragged about this for the last couple of years -- that the reason that they were able to get violent crime down so significantly is that these strike forces would go through neighborhoods and sort of shake people down for guns, people with minor infractions were taken off the streets -- it's a whole approach. And have you been looking for the last couple of years at whether these strike forces are too heavy handed and have resulted in incidents like the latest shootings?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: As I indicated, we have pattern and practice investigations underway now in New York. So I really should not comment on any issue with respect to that.

With respect to "touchy-feely," that is an interesting expression that you all have coined. But what good policing is, is not just touchy-feely, it is firm, fair enforcement

that fits the crime. It is rigorous investigations, conducted according to principles of due process, that do not single out any one group, and do not profile a matter based on race, and do not stop young people just because of race.

It is a process that people can have confidence in. What we need to do is to identify those that abuse the power that they have as police officers and take steps to see that they don't do it again.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, is one of the options you are looking at in this pattern and practice investigations -- one of the options that you are looking at to play observers?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: It will depend on what we find. And it would be inappropriate to comment at this early point.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, over the last several years there have been -- and I gather there was again this week from the folks in that review -- periodic calls for some kind of national commission to look at police conduct in America. We heard this after Waco. We heard this after Ruby Ridge. We heard this after some of the concerns that the National Rifle Association raised about the ATF. Various groups from all different spectrums have suggested this. And that is on the table again.

What do you think would be accomplished, if anything, by such a commission?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think what is important now is it is important for us to hear from people who have ideas and understand what can be done to build the trust, to identify the wrongdoers, and to get them out of policing if we cannot otherwise correct the situation.

What we need to do is to go forward and get some of these ideas implemented, share best practices with police agencies across the country as to how you enforce the law, but do it so that the public can have confidence. I think what it goes to is just what I was mentioning earlier --



that police represent the authority of government, a government who can tell its citizens what to do on certain occasions, more than any other group of people.

I mean the position of a police officer is extraordinarily important, because it represents the best and, in very limited circumstances, the worst. And we need to hear from people as to what is working in communities to promote the best.

There are a number of issues. How do we develop best practices to avoid people believing that they are being stopped just because of race? How do we create the best practices across this Nation to make sure that young people don't feel embittered because they feel like they were stopped just because they were young and black? How do we make sure that police officers are trained as best as they possibly can be trained and when to shoot and don't shoot?

Let me give you an example. I do not know how many around this table have participated in one of these simulators, but, with modern technology, you can now, with a laser gun, have scenes put up on a screen that are real-life scenes that a police officer faces -- somebody coming around a corner in a dark alley; is he friend? Is he foe? Is he going to shoot you? Is he not? Or is he going to shoot the person that he is with?

When to shoot and when not to shoot is one of the most difficult decisions in some circumstances that anybody could make. And I suspect if you all went around the table and did a series of five shoot/don't shoot situations, you would probably be killed three times. You would kill the wrong person twice and you would understand better than ever before how difficult these decisions are.

But it is imperative that we make sure our police officers have the training and the support they need to make these difficult decisions.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, back to the situation in New York, Mayor Giuliani is thinking about running for the Senate, as

is Hillary Clinton. Is that going to complicate it, the Clinton Justice Department looking at the New York Police Department?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We are going to do everything that we undertake in this investigation based on the evidence and the law and the desire to make sure that we take appropriate action against wrongdoers -- firm, vigorous action -- that reflects our feelings that this conduct should absolutely not be tolerated. But, at the same time, recognizing good policing and promoting it in every way we can.

QUESTION: Mr. Giuliani's spokeswoman said that the only reason you put out the statement last week was because the State Attorney General had announced their own investigation. What was the motivation of why you put out the statement?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I do not know when the Attorney General announced his. I do not do things based on what others do, because I do not usually know that they're doing it.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, to backtrack, what do you expect the Mayor's office in New York City to cooperate with the Justice investigation?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would hope that everybody could cooperate. Because what we are about here is building confidence. And the best way to build confidence is for people to talk out the issues and get them resolved. And, in connection with the criminal investigations, we will pursue those the right way.

QUESTION: Given the current climate there, how serious would you say the threat to public confidence in policing is there in New York?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment on the specific cases that we are investigating.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, may I engage in a bit of special pleading here?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: You are always so effective.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: In the last couple of weeks, for no reasons other than just the chance to talk with people in law enforcement, investigators in several Federal agencies -- some of which are Justice Department, some of which are Treasury, but all of which -- all of those cases are prosecuted by U.S. Attorneys -- they have said that they are being advised by U.S. Attorneys around the country that when they have big cases and big arrests, that they should limit more the amount of information that they publicly reveal about the nature of the crimes involved.

To give you a very simple example, drug agents and ATF agents have said they are being told that when they seize large amounts of illegal weapons or large amounts of illegal drugs that they should not follow the past practice of showing all the stuff that they have seized, but rather just show a small amount, a small sample. Is there some concern in the Department that in that past practice of showing all the stuff that is seized in a big case has hampered prosecution or led to acquittals when convictions were within reach?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I'm not aware of such advice. But, may I do this in response to your pleading, and rule that we will defer this, and I will appoint a special master --

(Laughter.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: -- Myron Marlin, to give you the best information that we can.

In a separate context that has nothing to do with your question, because I really do not know of any -- I do not know the cases of which you speak, so we need to pursue that and understand that -- I want to make very sure that

when we make arrests, because I've seen it before, people say, here we have all these drugs, we seized this, we seized that, what I'm more interested in is are what are we doing to make sure that we have put a drug organization out of business so that it does not spring up again. What are we doing to get the major people in the organization arrested, and not just the subordinates?

That is what I am interested in. And we can comment only in a limited way with respect to those issues, but I just want to make sure that we are as straightforward with the American people as we can be.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, with respect to what Mr. Williams said, I have heard similar information.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would refer you to Special Master Marlin.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, on the Campaign Finance Task Force, there has been no announcement or word of indictment for months now. Some are saying that their work has ground to a standstill, that the statute of limitations has expired in some cases. What is the exact status of the task force at this point? Have any avenues of the investigation been specifically closed?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: None have been specifically closed to my knowledge. We are trying to pursue every lead. You all get spoiled sometimes because there is one indictment after another, and then you think that that's what happens in every investigation. Think back to some of these investigations that take a long period of time, build on information developed from early arrests in the case. And, other than that, I cannot comment other than to say we are going to pursue every lead that we can as vigorously as possible.

QUESTION: But has the statute of limitations expired specifically in the case of John Huang?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment with respect to any matter that is pending.

QUESTION: While we are talking about pending investigations, is the Dan Burton investigation still going on?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment.

QUESTION: How about the Haley Barbour investigation?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, people are starting to focus on their political futures. Do you have any interest in running for office again?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I made a judgment that I would try, for whatever time I have here, to be the best Attorney General possible, and then I would go off and get in my truck and explore the country.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: Is Donna Shalala still going with you?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I do not know.

QUESTION: In your recent visits to Colombia, you expressed interest in getting some of the drug dealers from Colombia extradited to the U.S. I wonder if you could tell me if there has been any progress in those requests for extradition so far?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I could not comment concerning the Colombia proceedings, but we are very encouraged by events to date.

QUESTION: But at the moment they are in the Colombian Government's hands. I mean you have already requested their extradition and now you are waiting for the Colombian

Government to respond.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: It is now pending in Colombia.

QUESTION: Can I ask you one more question? Regarding the three Americans that were killed in Colombia, the three missionaries, I wonder if you would like to see those responsible added to the list of people that you are requesting for extradition?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment at this point, because it would be premature.

QUESTION: What would you like Justice to do with regard to those responsible?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would like, with all my heart and soul, to see that whomever is responsible for that is brought to justice.

QUESTION: Here?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: It will depend on the circumstances as to what is most appropriate. I just want to see that whoever did that terrible crime -- three missionaries -- they should be brought to justice.

QUESTION: Thank you, Ms. Reno.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you, all.

(Whereupon, at 9:54 a.m., the press conference concluded.)