



**DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE WEEKLY PRESS BRIEFING  
BRIEFER: ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO  
JUSTICE DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON, D.C.  
9:31 A.M. EDT THURSDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2000**

Q Good morning.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Good morning.

Earlier this morning, there was an explosion adjacent to one of our destroyers which was docked in a port in Yemen. Our hearts go out to all those who survived, to those who were injured, to the families of those who were killed. We will do everything we can to find out what caused this tragedy. The FBI is working together with the Defense Department and other investigative agencies to investigate the accident -- the incident. The FBI has already dispatched local resources to the scene, and it is sending investigators, explosive experts and an evidence response team.

Q And can you tell us the nature of the resources that the FBI is sending to the region in terms of -- (inaudible.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: No, we will do everything that we can.

Q Ms. Reno, whatever you can say about whatever warning we may have had. Did the United States receive any kind of warnings? Do we have any reason to think at this point who might be behind it?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I can't comment further at this time.

Q Do we know the nature of the explosives? Were there

witnesses?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Again, from this distance, I don't think we should comment until we have more complete facts.

Q Ms. Reno, will the U.S. federal government be on a heightened state of alert both in terms of within the U.S. and naval facilities around the -- and military facilities around the world?

ATTY GEN. RENO: That is an issue that is being addressed.

Q Do you know if this is connected to the current unrest in the Middle East, or is it --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it would be premature to say.

Q Ma'am, do you have the latest figures in casualties, killed and injured?

ATTY GEN. RENO: The latest figures I have were five killed and 30 injured. But we will try to keep you advised as to what we know.

Q Ms. Reno, when was the department notified and how?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We were notified this morning. When I came in, I was given the notice. I don't know exactly what time we received it, but it came from the Defense Department.

Q From DoD?

ATTY GEN. RENO: That's as I understand it.

Q Is the FBI establishing -- I'm sure they have contacts with the Yemeni authorities. Are they setting up a liaison office in Yemen?

ATTY GEN. RENO: As I indicated, we've already

dispatched resources from that area to the scene.

Q Ms. Reno, what can you tell the American people about Yemen in terms of whether there's been terrorist activity in that country and whether we have any sense that terrorist groups operate out of Yemen?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it would be important now to assess everything that we have -- we're working with everybody else. But until we have more complete facts, I don't think it would be helpful to comment.

Q Is the FBI the lead investigative agency? What's the coordination between the FBI and the DoD on this?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No, on matters beyond our borders, the State Department heads the effort, but we will work with everybody and provide whatever support we can and conduct such investigation as is appropriate.

Q Does the Justice Department have a direct role in addition to the FBI resources that have been dispatched to the region?

ATTY GEN. RENO: That would be premature to say. Obviously we're all involved in it in terms of what should be done based on the information that is developed.

Q Ms. Reno, the evidence response team, will that come from the U.S.? And do you have any indication of how soon they'll be prepared to go?

ATTY GEN. RENO: What we're trying to do is respond as quickly as possible. And the FBI, I am sure -- I talked to Deputy Director Picard this morning because Director Freeh was en route. We will provide whatever resources we possibly can.

Q Did you get the impression that that --

Q Director Freeh was en route to Yemen?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No. I don't know where he was en route to.

Q Oh.

Q Did you get the impression -- sorry -- that that team will be on its way today?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I would very much hope.

Q You say the -- did you say the Department of State was taking the lead in this matter?

ATTY GEN. RENO: The Department of State, in any matter that occurs overseas, is the lead agency, and as we are for anything that is domestic.

Q Is CIA and Justice coordinating at this point?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We're --

Q CIA?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Again, I have described our efforts, and I think to go further would be premature at this point.

Q Did you say that Director Freeh was involved?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No, I said he was en route someplace. I don't know. I could not reach him at the time I called. But he's not en route to Yemen.

Q But will a senior FBI official go to Yemen to take charge of at least the bureau's efforts there?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'm sure that the FBI will have all appropriate personnel available and at the scene.

Q What the best information that -- (inaudible.) What's the latest and best information you have about precisely

when and how this occurred?

ATTY GEN. RENO: When or how what?

Q When and how this incident occurred.

ATTY GEN. RENO: I've given you the best information I have.

Q When you say next to a destroyer or adjacent to one of our destroyers, do you know how close the explosion was?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No, I don't.

Q Do you know if the victims are members of the U.S. Navy or the U.S. military?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I am told that they are, but that should be subject to confirmation from the Defense Department.

Q Ms. Reno, one other question. Did you get any indication of the size or force of this explosion or how much damage it did

to the ship?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think that would be more appropriate for the Defense Department to address.

Q Last question: Have there been any credible claims of responsibility? Anything that's happened since the attack to make

you -- to lead the direction in one way or another -- lead the investigation one way or another?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I should not comment any further.

Q Ms. Reno, you've been careful in your remarks not to use the word terrorism or attack. What is the best

assessment of what we have here so far?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it would be premature to comment.

Q Has there been a meeting this morning that you can describe to us of U.S. officials in any manner to discuss this matter and to organize? Since there's so many different parts of the government involved, can you give us a sense of that?

ATTY GEN. RENO: All I can tell you is that the FBI has met to organize and respond as appropriate.

Q Will you be -- you and other officials be briefing the president any time soon on this initial investigation?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We will provide whatever information is developed. I'm sure that the president has been briefed.

Q What is your role vis-a-vis the -- did the FBI take this initiative on its own, or were you involved in its decision to deploy resources to the region?

ATTY GEN. RENO: When I called Director -- Deputy Director Picard, he was already responding.

I'd like to go now to another subject. This morning, I was planning to talk to you about an important initiative to encourage new community partnerships among federal, state and local prosecutors to help communities fight gun-related crimes.

Negotiations involving this and other Justice Department funding are now ongoing, and accordingly, I think it would be best for me not to go into details of the proposal.

I will say this: For the last eight years, crime has been falling in every region of the country and for every type of crime. Violent crimes committed with guns are down 35 percent since 1992. But we can't rest now. We cannot become complacent. Because of the good progress we have made in

reducing crime, I think we have some understanding of what it takes to see this through. And we have a historic -- (intercom sounds) -- we have an historic opportunity.

Yesterday, the Senate took an important step in passing the Violence Against Women Act of 2000, which authorizes more than \$3 billion over the next five years to fund victim services, prevention efforts, law enforcement prosecutions and courts targeting domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking. This is a good, common-sense approach to reducing the epidemic of domestic violence and successfully and permanently intervening in the cycle of violence.

Common sense gun laws and new tools to support our communities to fight gun crimes can help reduce the epidemic of gun violence in our society. That is why it is critical that Congress seize this opportunity and take important additional steps to reduce gun violence through funding the administration's Community Prosecutions Program.

Q Ms. Reno, last week you said the tobacco lawsuit was imperiled. Do you have a comment?

ATTY GEN. RENO: That was your expression. (Scattered laughter.)

Q You suggested the tobacco lawsuit needed to be fully funded, and called on Congress to do so.

ATTY GEN. RENO: That's correct.

Q What has happened since, in that regard?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We are engaged in discussion, and I very much hope that Congress will address this issue so that we can proceed.

Q Has there been any progress --

ATTY GEN. RENO: Again, I think we are engaged in conversation, and those conversations should be ongoing.

Q Will the Justice Department appeal the dismissal by Judge Kessler of those RICO counts in the civil case?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have not gotten the final word on that in terms of recommendations.

Q Ms. Reno, it's been seven months since you met the family of Amadou Diallo and with the representatives of the four officers. Can you give us a sense of where your investigation is? The civil trial is on hold, the officers' IA investigation is on hold. Can you give us an update?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No, I can't. As you know, I don't comment on pending matters.

Q Back to guns -- I understand you don't want to get into the dotting of i's and crossing of t's, but what are you basically asking Congress for? Is this the legislation the administration has had before; closing the gun show loophole and so forth?

ATTY GEN. RENO: What I'm particularly referring to, although we would like to achieve that as well, is the need for community prosecutors who can focus at the state and local level, at the federal level, with federal prosecutors, to identify each gun case and make an appropriate determination as to who should handle it -- federal or state and locals; and make sure that nobody illegally possesses, uses, sells, distributes a gun if they are not legally entitled to do so.

Q So this is a funding issue. And do you have any idea how much money they're talking about in this budget?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it better that we not address it further. The discussions are ongoing and --

Q But could you say what your request was originally?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it would be better just to let the discussions proceed.



Q There has been very little in the way of questions and answers in the two debates about crime, and especially drug crime.

Would you like to see more emphasis on, let's say, the drug epidemic?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it's important that we look at the whole picture because so much of crime is interrelated. What we saw, coming into office, was violence spawned in many instances by drugs, drugs or alcohol. I think it is imperative that we pursue treatment and prevention programs that avoid the problem in the first place. I think we've had great success in identifying the major drug organizations, the violent drug organizations, and organizing against them, working with state and locals in partnership, and taking those out through prosecution and through substantial jail and prison sentences. Those are important efforts, and I think you can see a direct correlation in many instances with a corresponding reduction in crime.

I think it is important to continue to expand drug courts, intervening for the first offender charged with possession of a small amount of drugs. And there are now over 400 in the country. I think we must continue to provide technical assistance and to use the carrot-and-stick approach that says, look, work with us and we'll get you into job training and placement and get you off to a fresh and positive start; but if you mess up on the way, you're going to face a more serious sanction every step of the way.

I think we can expand these efforts to others that are in prison now who are suffering from serious substance abuse problems and use their time in prison, with a drug court model, to effect some permanent change in their experience. I think it is vital that we continue to pursue the reentry courts and reentry partnerships that are now beginning to pick up across the country, so that we address the 500,000 prisoners that will return to the streets of America over the next year, and every year for the next four or five years. If they go back to the apartment over the open-air

drug market where they started to use drugs in the first place, that's not going to be very conducive to staying out of trouble.

We can do so much if we approach it from a common sense point of view, if we eliminate the political rhetoric, and if we develop our plans of action based on a data, hard information, that tells us this is the major drug organization, let's organize our efforts around that.

But we're also engaged in a new effort. In effect, it's an old effort, but we're trying to pull all the pieces together so that when a community first evidences problems with a new type of drug, that we respond immediately, having now the data necessary to identify the new drug coming to a particular community, and then through treatment, through tough enforcement, through intervention, through public service announcements, through early prevention programs, make a difference in that community with respect to that particular drug.

Q Have you advised the vice president at all about your outlook, what you just told us?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think the vice president is familiar with what we're trying to do.

Q But you did watch the debates?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I watched the first debate. I didn't watch -- I was not able to watch most of the second debate.

Q Ms. Reno, do you owe Charles Bakaly an apology?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Do I owe Charles Bakaly -- no, I don't think so.

Q Why?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Why should I?

Q There are, shall we say, associates of the Starr-Ray

office and Mr. Bakaly who say, contrary to what we were told, that the Justice Department was a reluctant prosecutor; that in fact the prosecution of him was a sort of vendetta against the Independent Counsel's Office.

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think that has no basis in any information that I've received. My understanding of what happened is that the judge entered an order to show cause, that the matter was referred to us by the independent counsel, that we reviewed the information and determined that perjury charges should not be filed. And since the court had entered the order to show cause and, I understand, asked us to handle it, we proceeded. I can assure you that from my point of view, there was nothing except a response to the court that was the basis of our action.

Q There was a letter, however, from one of your Criminal Division people to the judge that seemed to invite her to proceed with a contempt matter rather than just dropping it.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Well, I think that would be up to the judge. I wouldn't comment further on that.

Q And why was it handled by a deputy assistant attorney general? It's highly unusual for someone in that position to serve as a line prosecutor.

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think this -- any situation that involves the independent counsel must be done carefully and thoughtfully, so that we don't do anything that interferes.

Q May I ask you -- back on the crime issue, the FBI's final figures for 1999 are due out this week, and all the indications are that it will confirm that crime is continuing to fall at a significant pace. And I wonder if you have any thought about whether it's realistic to expect that this kind of drop in crime can continue for the foreseeable future. We've had something like seven years now of drops, and including a 7 percent rate in the last few years. Is there any reason to expect that that won't

continue?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Well, the figures are embargoed until, I think, the 15th. So let me go back to earlier figures. And I just think it is vitally important -- as I pointed out in my earlier remarks, crime is now down eight years in a row. That's one of the longest declines in our history.

But I've been there before when it starts back up. And what I think we've been able to accomplish is a consistent, determined effort on the part of a vast number of people in this country -- the police officer on the streets, law enforcement agencies, state and federal prosecutors, prison officials, prevention specialists, mayors, leaders, county leaders across the country -- who've developed strong community initiatives. I think we can -- have shown that this nation, if it approaches crime in a sensible way, can have an impact.

But let me give you an example. There will be 500,000 people coming back from prison or jails this year. They can come back marked as ex-offenders, unable to get a job, presumed by the community to be the person responsible for the next crime committed down the road, and they will be right back in prison again, having committed another crime and perhaps contributed to an increase in crime.

The smart way to approach those people coming back is to do everything we can to prepare them before they leave prison for life on the outside, develop mentors or other groups such as churches, private, not-for-profit groups that can mentor them, if you will, and prepare them for life on the outside.

Or if that's not a cause for concern, there may be a new substance like we've not dreamed of, that we don't know about, that comes in and causes a significant increase in crime as crack did in the early '80s.

I think we have shown what we can do or what we can begin -- we've begun to show what we can do if we spot something early on, address it in an effective way and a

comprehensive way. We have tools we never dreamed of before. I used -- Miami had about 26, and it now has a number more, so I don't know the exact number now, municipalities, plus the county. And so I'd have to deal with different police agencies. I'd see something in an arrest report indicating that an Oldsmobile with a particular dent on the right fender was used in a 7-11 robbery. And I often used to think, if I could find that -- I bet I could find that Oldsmobile in other robberies or find common denominators in other robberies that would link the robberies together and enable me to solve the crime. We now have that opportunity in terms of what cyber-tools have given us to collect data, to analyze the data, to understand what our problems are that are emerging and that continue.

It is exciting for somebody who started in law enforcement in 1972. We've come a long way. I can tell you, we've come an extraordinarily long way since I had my first summer job in the sheriff's office in 1956, and the tools are incredibly different. If we use our tools, if we use DNA, if we use modern technology, and we use it smart, I think we can address these issues.

Q Ms. Reno, some of the major cities last year did see an increase in murder. How concerned -- is that something that the federal government is monitoring, that some of the major cities did see an increase?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Here's my hope: that federal, state and local authorities in each jurisdiction, and we need to define the jurisdictions so that we do not affect changes within the city and then watch it spill over to the more rural areas and vice-versa.

Because I think that's what's happened a lot, that the cities have made tremendous strides and it's pushed crime out into the >suburbs into the more rural areas. We've got to look at the whole nation, not just part of it; but plan jurisdiction by jurisdiction as to how we share information.

I'd like to see us develop databases in every jurisdiction that will permit us to put in the information from FBI -- what are called 302 forms; DEA-6's, arrest and incident reports from county and local police so that you are able, with the assistance of a trained analyst, to say, "okay, we've got five organizations in this city -- drug organizations -- this seems to be the paramount one; the one having the greatest impact on the community. Here are the leads that we can follow." Just itemize the leads, pursue it, see just what we have.

Something is happening -- the murders are starting back up. What is the common denominator of the murders? Do a study with the medical examiners office; see what we can find. If we can use this information, if we can get it out; if we can use it in solid form, we're going to be ahead of the game.

Q Ms. Reno, are you trying to push the FBI to solve the mystery of the Bush debate tape before the election?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't try to push the FBI to do anything that is premature, and I think my discussions with Director Freeh is proceeding in an appropriate manner.

Q Ms. Reno, some community leaders in New York city are charging the Department of Justice are, quote, "stalling" the Diallo investigation until the change of administration.

How do you respond to that?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I've tried every way I know how not to react to politics and I'm going to continue to try to do everything I can to make sure that we do it the right way. What the right way is is difficult to say, but we're trying to do this without interfering with politics and without letting politics interfere with what we are doing.

Q The backdrop, obviously, is the Department of Justice is investigating the NYPD for not disciplining their officers quick enough. Do you see that there's sort of an

imbalance? The NYPD can't discipline these officers, because of the lengthy DOJ investigation.

ATTY GEN. RENO: We will continue to work with everybody to ensure that it's done in an -- appropriately -- appropriate manner. When I say something will be concluded within a certain time, I think that puts limits on an appropriate and thorough investigation, and I think that should be our ultimate goal.

Q Ms. Reno, can you give us an update on where the Justice Department is, if anywhere, on the Firestone tire controversy?

ATTY GEN. RENO: My understanding on that is -- (pause) -- let's see if I can give you the latest -- NHTSA, which is the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, has the primary authority on this matter. We're ready to provide any support, should NHTSA ask.

Q But they haven't asked yet?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We have met with NHTSA to discuss the investigation. I think it's premature to discuss what action, if any, might be taken in the future.

Q Ms. Reno --

Q Ms. Reno, how would you define the FBI's mission in approaching the incident which you described earlier? What is the FBI's mission, and what are the parameters -- (off mike)?

ATTY GEN. RENO: After I -- they're on the scene, I think we will be better able to answer that question.

Q Ms. Reno, on that topic --

Q I just want to follow on that. Is there -- could you, looking at history, address how the FBI has been involved in cases perhaps similar to what happened in Yemen, what the role of the FBI might be --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'm not going to discuss it in connection with any other matter, because that would cause people to >conclude that we think they are equivalent or something. I think it would be more appropriate to see what is developed and at an appropriate time -- (beeper is heard) -- you-all are certainly beeping an awful lot! (Laughter.)

Q (Off mike) -- our machines.

Q Beeping.

Q (Laughs.)

Q Ms. Reno, on the Yemeni --

ATTY GEN. RENO: Let me -- so I think it would be important for us to have a better grasp after we get people on the scene.

Q Ms. Reno, on the Yemeni explosion, we say "local resources" are sent to the scene. Are you talking about FBI resources already in position in the Middle East?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: We're trying, as I understand it, to get those FBI representatives closest to the area who can provide support; we're trying to get them there.

Q And do you know if the destroyer was on its own, or was it part of some screen for an aircraft carrier group?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I think it would be important that the Defense Department comment.

Q Ms. Reno, do you favor federal legislation that would ban or make illegal racial profiling by police departments? And why do you feel, notwithstanding the Justice Department's efforts, that there is some racial profiling continuing in state and local police departments across the country?



ATTY. GEN. RENO: I think it is important for all of us, not just state and local, but all of us to constantly review what we're doing. We're working with state and local police to address this issue and to make sure that people understand part of it is communication. Sometimes you stop a person because that's -- he fits the description of the all-points bulletin that announced that this person might be a suspect in a serious crime. Other times, you stop somebody and you can't say why you stopped them and that becomes a matter of concern.

I think what we're trying to do is to work with state and locals and to try to do it on a comprehensive basis to come together and figure out how we can advise people in a constructive, proper, dignified, respectful manner, why they were stopped, let them know, and build trust and communication, a sense of communication with our police officers. That's happening in so many communities across America now, because people are stopped all the time. Many police agencies respond. The frustration lies in, "Why did you stop me? I wasn't doing anything wrong," or "Why did you stop me, you don't seem to be stopping anybody else." Those are the issues I think we have to address.

Q Do you favor federal legislation on that?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I'd like to look at the legislation and see just how it would be structured and see what --

I don't want something just for something's sake. I want something that's substantive, that builds trust with police officers, gives the public an understanding of what they're trying to do, and leads to support for police officers as well.

Q Following up on that; what about an executive order by the president? Would that be something that you would favor?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Again, I think we should look at the language and work together to figure out how we address the heart of the issue, which is communication: why did it

happen, what was the basis of it? And let the public be informed.

Q Thank you.

END.