

**Remarks as Prepared for Attorney General Holder at Institute
on Domestic Violence in the African American Community
(IDVAAC) Conference**

A Journey to Healing: Finding a Path

**Long Beach, CA
Monday, August 3, 2009**

Good afternoon. It's a pleasure to address this conference hosted by the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community. I want to take the opportunity to thank all of you who are participating in this conference for your dedication to ending violence against women. Ending domestic violence has been a priority for me throughout my career in public service. Working with you to end violence in our families – and in our communities - remains one of my highest priorities as Attorney General.

The work you do is not easy. As a judge at the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, I saw first hand the suffering and long-term trauma experienced by women and children who were victims of domestic violence. As the U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia, I created the first Domestic Violence Unit in the office's history. As Deputy Attorney General, I helped to launch the U.S. Department of Justice's Children Exposed to Violence Initiative, as well as the Safe Start Initiative. And now, as Attorney General, I am committed to reinvigorating our work on these very important issues.

Domestic violence not only devastates women and their families, but society as a whole. Violence against women cuts across race, socio-economic status, gender and sexual orientation. For the African American community, the statistics are staggering. The National Violence Against Women Survey found that 18.8 percent of African American women reported surviving rape. Approximately 40 percent of black women report coercive sexual contact by age 18, and intimate partner homicide is the leading cause of death for African-American women ages 15 to 45. These statistics are shocking and completely unacceptable.

Every year, millions of children and adolescents in the United States are victimized and exposed to violence in their homes and communities. Children who are victims of, or witnesses to violence often suffer severe, of course, different long-term consequences. The scars are not only physical but emotional. Children react to violence in their lives in different ways. However, the trauma associated with violence may result in developmental problems including attachment difficulties, anxiety and depression, and aggression. Exposure to violence affects how children feel, how they act, and how they learn. When these problems remain unaddressed, children are at higher risk for school failure, substance abuse, repeat victimization, and perhaps, most tragically, perpetrating violent behavior later in their own lives. We must intervene. I ask for your help to address this problem in a way that will make a lasting difference in the lives of children today and for generations to come.

Over the next few days you will engage in vital conversations and exchange innovative ideas. In particular, I want to know how we, at the Department of Justice, can work with you to confront violence against women in the African-American community. Now, while we recognize that law enforcement has a significant role to play - especially as it relates to creating safety for victims; we also know that we cannot rely upon the criminal justice system alone. We want to work with you to identify community-defined solutions that work to end the violence and that provide women and children with a path to healing and recovery.

You will be exploring some very important topics:

- What are the special challenges in the African American community related to domestic violence, child victimization and healing?
- Why are women of color, who are the victims of domestic violence, losing custody of their children to the child protection system?
- Why are children of color over-represented in the child protection system?
- How do we engage African American men as allies and as mentors and positive role models for children?

Now, as you explore these questions, I ask that you remember that the needs of children victimized by domestic violence are inextricably linked to the needs of their mothers.

I want to thank the Institute and its Executive Director, Dr. Oliver Williams, for awarding me the Wellstone Humanitarian Award. I am honored and humbled. Sheila and Paul Wellstone were true champions who dedicated much of their lives to ending violence against women. In receiving this award, I, again, dedicate myself to working to end violence against women and children and to working with you to create stronger and safer communities across the country.

I am looking forward to hearing about the ideas that surface at this conference and to learning about how we can work together more effectively to end this cycle of violence. The Department of Justice and this Administration supports your work. Thank you, and have a great conference.

PLEASE NOTE: These remarks, as originally delivered in 2009, cited a statistic naming intimate partner homicide as the leading cause of death for African-American women ages 15 to 45. This statistic was drawn from a range of reputable sources, including a 2003 study by the [National Institute of Justice](#). However, recent figures indicate other causes of death-including cancer and heart disease-outrank intimate partner homicide for this age group.