

REMARKS OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
COMMISSIONER'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE
OF DISTRICT DIRECTORS AND BORDER PATROL
SECTOR CHIEFS
IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE
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I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to you today. This is a very opportune time for the first meeting of INS regional commissioners, border patrols chiefs, and senior management of the agency.

As you may be aware, Commissioner Alan Nelson and I have just returned from an extensive trip, during which we visited refugee camps and talked with Asian leaders about the problems of drugs, refugees, and illegal aliens. Throughout the trip, I was struck by the universality of these problems and the human tragedy they embody. It is both sad and outrageous that massive assaults on human rights in Indochina and Afghanistan have driven millions from their homes as refugees. I have seldom been as moved as when I spoke with some 200 Afghan leaders in their tribal tent at Nasir Bagh. In the background was a refugee village of make-shift huts stretching as far as the eye could see. And we saw in the faces of the Afghans their fierce determination to fight the Soviet aggressors until the day they can return to their homeland. They were grateful and we were proud that the United States plays a leading part in the international relief effort -- providing some thirty to forty percent of the United Nations and World Food Program budgets. I expressed to them the firm support of the American people, and the wish of freedom-loving people everywhere that they would return to their homes in peace and freedom.

In Thailand we visited the Khmer and Vietnamese refugees at Kamput and Phanat Nikhom, and I was convinced anew of the effectiveness of our efforts to resettle those whose hopes of returning to their homes have dimmed. And I was most proud of our INS colleagues who, far from home, perform the agonizing and often thankless task of faithfully applying our refugee law in an uncertain and trying situation, a process which we reviewed in detail. These officers are an outpost not only of INS but of American freedom.

Our concerns overseas were not limited to refugees. Hong Kong, France, and Italy -- like the United States -- have been beset by illegal immigration in recent years. The governments of Hong Kong and France have undertaken measures, including employer sanctions and legalization, that are similar in many respects to parts of the Administration's proposed immigration reform legislation. In Hong Kong we learned that these efforts have already helped to deter new illegal migration from mainland China. We had lengthy discussions about the relevance of these initiatives to our own reforms, and Commissioner Nelson is actively pursuing close collaboration should we face the task of implementing similar initiatives.

The problems posed by the displaced persons of Southeast Asia are difficult ones, and we explored them fully on this trip. The United States must continue to participate in solving these problems -- as must the international community.

There has never been a more critical time in the history of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. It has been one hundred years since Congress enacted the first general act restricting immigration. As we enter our second century of immigration law, it is time for a new beginning. We are well on the way to that new beginning.

The task of fairly and efficiently administering our Nation's immigration laws and securing our country's borders against illegal immigration has never been more difficult. You have been given, in the past, the impossible goal of enforcing unrealistic policies.

Continued illegal arrivals numbering in the millions, the Cuban boatlift of 1980, and the burgeoning refugee program demonstrated that by 1981 we had lost control of our Nation's borders. For far too long, these failures had been casually laid at the door of the INS. This agency, too frequently treated as a stepchild of the Justice Department, had not been given the resources, the organization, or the substantive policies necessary to carry out its difficult mission.

This Administration quickly recognized that the status quo was intolerable, and we acted to bring about change. We are committed to building an Immigration Service that works and that has legal authorities sufficient to get its job done. The President has

endorsed a comprehensive program of reform, and our implementation of improvements is already well underway.

The Administration requested and received from the Congress significant additional resources for INS in the last fiscal year, and these have been carried forward in the President's 1983 budget request.

We proposed to the Congress comprehensive and realistic reform legislation, which has passed the Senate. We have acted vigorously on behalf of immigration reform in this Congress and will continue to make every effort to secure passage in the House during the few remaining weeks of this session.

For INS, this is just the beginning. Under Commissioner Nelson, the Service has been invigorated and organized so that it can perform more effectively, expeditiously, and fairly. Mr. Nelson, for example, recently submitted to the Department and won approval for a plan to streamline the organizational structure of INS to maximize its efficiency. He has, in addition, taken steps to improve INS' service to the public and decrease its backlogs.

No reform legislation, however enlightened, could have more than a cosmetic effect without such initiatives. Alan Nelson's commitment to improving the Service is of vital importance. It is a task in which he, and all of you working with him, have my full support.

Those of you in this room and others throughout the country have served the Immigration Service with dedication and skill, under the most difficult circumstances. The new Immigration Service must build on that foundation, and prepare for the challenges that lie ahead. I am confident that all of you will provide the firm leadership that we need.

We are a proud nation of immigrants and wish to preserve that heritage. Our commitment to be generous to the world's refugees and continue a strong program of legal immigration is unshakable. We also recognize, however, that we as a nation still do have unrealized aspirations for our citizens and our children. One hundred years ago Congress determined that our Nation's desire to welcome foreigners to our shores must be tempered by realistic limits fairly applied. That is even more true today, as improved transportation and communication have made the world's people more mobile,

and heightened the desire and ability of millions to reach the United States.

The legislation now pending before the House of Representatives is the first real prospect in over a decade for correcting a situation that could soon grow beyond remedy.

The Administration has already taken firm steps to curtail illegal immigration by sea from the Caribbean. By planning adequately, we have ensured that this Nation will never again be caught unprepared for a disaster like the 1980 Mariel boatlift, which was, among other things, a serious drain on the limited resources of the INS.

By interdicting the illegal smugglers of Caribbean boat people, we have saved lives while reducing this unsavory traffic to a mere trickle, instead of the thousands of persons who reached our shores in recent years.

The passage of the immigration reform legislation will not end our task, but will be only the beginning. The processing of millions of applications for legalization is but one of the major jobs that will confront the Service. Given your already staggering workloads, that may appear to be an insurmountable problem. But the planning that has already gone into this, the assistance of voluntary agencies, and the dedication that Service people have brought to other difficult responsibilities in the past all indicate that we can accomplish our mission.

In addition, the new legislation would give to you another enforcement task -- identifying and bringing to justice those employers who knowingly and deliberately continue to hire and employ illegal aliens. You will also have an obligation to aid in educating those who respect the law and wish to operate within it.

Your current responsibilities and the ones that you bear in the future are as large as they are crucial. However, you are not alone. The INS makes up twenty percent of the personnel of the Department of Justice, and your obligations and your goals are ours as well.

The Administration stands firmly with you. The law enforcement resources that the President obtained have provided for more Border Patrol, as well as the operation of helicopters and other needed equipment. Additional funds have also made possible expanded efforts

against alien smugglers and more efficient processing of alien records.

By targeting enforcement resources in priority locations, such as the southern border and the largest cities, INS has further enhanced its enforcement programs. By concentrating investigative resources in areas of high illegal alien employment, INS at the same time has been defending American's jobs.

While such enforcement efforts will continue to be of vital importance, we must not forget that INS is a service, as well as an enforcement, agency. The immigrants, visitors, students, and others who rely upon the INS are often among the best and most energetic citizens of their home countries. INS personnel may well be the first people they encounter in this new land, and the impression made by INS can color their view of America for a long time to come. The proper handling of such requests for service is a job of great importance.

I have been impressed by the loyalty and the dedication that have been exhibited by the personnel and the leadership of INS. The agency is in good hands. All of you recognize the hard work and further dedication that will be required to bring illegal immigration under control and improve the quality and efficiency of services. I know that this is your desire, as much as it is mine. And we are all grateful and proud that you are equal to the demanding task the Nation has assigned to you.