

<title>10-11-96: Presentation before the First National Interfaith Breakfast:
A Call to End Violence Against Women</title>

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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A CALL TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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JANET RENO

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ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

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Hart Senate Office Building, Room 908

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Washington, D.C.

15

October 11, 1996

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1 P R E S E N T A T I O N

2 Thank you so much, and thank you for
3 that warm welcome, but it is I that should be
4 applauding all of you. I see people that I
5 have met in these last three and a half years,
6 and I see people whose reputation has preceded
7 them in these last three and a half
8 years, and I just admire the work that you do
9 throughout this nation. Thank you.

10 And I thank you for joining us today
11 at this first National Interfaith Breakfast
12 devoted to the issue of violence against women.
13 This breakfast is the culmination of many
14 months of work by the Center for the Prevention
15 of Sexual and Domestic Violence, the National
16 Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.,
17 and the National Jewish Community Relations
18 Advisory Council.

19 I know that I speak for us all when I
20 say thank you so very, very much for doing this
21 and for giving us this opportunity to highlight
22 this issue in this nation. I know that, as a

1 result of your work, breakfast and other

2 activities are being held today in communities
3 throughout the country, bringing together
4 representatives of domestic violence, and
5 sexual assault prevention programs with their
6 local ecumenical and interfaith groups.

7 I am honored that you have asked me
8 to join you this morning to discuss some of our
9 efforts at the Justice Department to combat
10 domestic violence and violence against women.
11 This has been a concern of mine since I served
12 as State Attorney in Dade County, which is
13 Miami's county, for fifteen years.

14 In 1978, just after I took office,
15 our medical examiner called me and said, "Why
16 don't you come analyze our cases to see why
17 people have been killed in the county in the
18 previous 20 years? We have good records."

19 We asked the University of Miami
20 interns to volunteer, and together we analyzed
21 the records, and forty percent of the homicides
22 were related to domestic violence, ex-spouse,

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1 boyfriend-girlfriend, husband and wife.

2 And we focused through an LEAA grant

3 in developing a domestic intervention program.
4 At that time, police weren't that interested,
5 they just referred to the case as, "That's a
6 domestic." Judges weren't that interested:
7 They were happy when the woman wanted to drop
8 the case.

9 But we tried to persevere in
10 developing a domestic violence unit, and I had
11 a policy that said you don't drop the case
12 unless I have a chance to speak to the victim.
13 And so, for fifteen years I spoke to a lot of
14 victims.

15 And the pain and the terror and the
16 heartbreak and the abasement will live with me
17 for the rest of my life. It is a prison worse
18 than any prison you can put people in. And it
19 made me convinced that this was an effort that
20 must be developed across the country.

21 I am happy to tell you that, by the
22 time I left, there were only a couple of judges

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1 that didn't take their cases seriously, and
2 police departments were beginning to galvanize
3 around the issue.

4 But we must do it across the country

5 because it is not just a large urban area. I
6 go to Iowa or to Kentucky and talk to
7 representatives from small towns or just rural
8 counties, and they tell me the same problem.
9 And it is more acute in that distant Iowa
10 county because they don't have access to shelters.
11 They don't have access to counselling. It is
12 more difficult, and they are more alone.

13 So, wherever we are in this great
14 country, this is an area that we must focus on.
15 But it is not just domestic violence; it is
16 sexual assault against women. We were
17 fortunate to have a marvelous rape treatment
18 center in Miami, one of the first and best in
19 the nation.

20 But, again, to sit with victims, to
21 feel their pain, to have some understanding,
22 after hearing from one victim after another,

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1 what it was like, it is so important that we
2 focus our efforts as we do this morning.

3 But the solutions to domestic
4 violence and violence throughout our society
5 are not going to be found by prosecutors alone

6 or by police alone or social workers or
7 religious leaders working just by themselves.

8 The answer is going to be found only
9 when all of us are a part of this effort, and
10 it is vitally important that the religious
11 community be a part of it.

12 One of the reasons it is so important
13 is so many women have told me, "I didn't know
14 who to go to. My doctor, after he finished
15 putting in the stitches, didn't want to talk
16 about it. I didn't know who to go to."

17 And one's church, one's temple may be
18 the best way for people to open the door to a
19 new world for themselves. It is only when all
20 of us are involved that we can build a seamless
21 system of care, a multi-faceted system that
22 brings police and prosecutors, health care

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1 professionals and social workers, educators,
2 employers, and religious leaders together at
3 the same table and in the lives of victims or
4 potential victims, sharing ideas and
5 perspectives and working together to find
6 answers to the problem.

7 One of the great challenges we face

8 today is to bring even more people into the
9 effort, to increase the number of Americans who
10 are willing to stand up and work for an end to
11 domestic violence and other forms of violence
12 against women.

13 As you know, for the second year in a
14 row, President Clinton has named October as
15 National Domestic Violence Awareness Month.
16 During this month, efforts are under way
17 throughout our country to increase the
18 awareness of women at risk of the resources
19 available to them, and, perhaps just as
20 importantly, efforts are under way to educate
21 all Americans about this issue and the ways
22 they can make a contribution to ending the

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1 violence.

2 It is so gratifying to see men across
3 this nation standing up and saying, "We want to
4 work with you," and telling us it isn't going
5 to work unless we are part of the team. It is
6 so gratifying for me, and I am deeply
7 appreciative.

8 Last week, as part of domestic

9 violence awareness month, I released a new
10 community check list prepared by the members of
11 the Advisory Council on Violence Against Women,
12 a group of leaders from the public and private
13 sector who have worked for the past year and a
14 half to help implement the Violence Against
15 Women Act.

16 Marie Fortune represents the
17 religious community on the Council, and she has
18 done a wonderful job bringing together some
19 concrete recommendations on what can be done
20 within the religious community to highlight the
21 issue of domestic violence and to provide real
22 assistance to families who are in need.

9

1 I hope you will take an opportunity
2 to review the recommendations included in the
3 community checklist. They include ideas for
4 making churches, synagogues, mosques, and
5 meeting halls safe places for women who are
6 abused, ideas for educating members of your
7 congregations, and ideas for working with other
8 interested members of your community to
9 highlight the importance of this issue.

10 The work that council has done,

11 Marie, has just been extraordinary. It is
12 wonderful to have business leaders, religious
13 leaders, the head of the ABA, the head of the
14 AMA, sitting around a table, and telling Donna
15 Shalala and me, "Okay, now, these are good
16 ideas, what are you going to do about them?"

17 So, as I prepare for the next council
18 meeting, I am saying, "Okay what have we done?
19 I am not going back there until I have proved
20 to them what we have done."

21 If there are things that we can do to
22 help you, all you have to do is to let us know.

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1 I know that Bonnie Campbell and the Violence
2 Against Women office, our U.S. Attorneys and
3 their staffs, the FBI and other law enforcement
4 officials in the Federal Government would be
5 happy to work with local officials and
6 religious leaders to highlight the seriousness
7 of domestic and sexual violence and our
8 commitment to end it.

9 There are 93 U.S. Attorneys in this
10 country. When I first became involved in the
11 criminal justice system, I thought that they

12 prosecuted bank robberies. Then I thought that
13 they prosecuted drug cases, but I thought that
14 they could be a marvelous force for good on so
15 many different fronts, including our efforts in
16 violence against women. And they can be a
17 great ally for you in your district.

18 Throughout October, in communities
19 all across America, activities are planned in
20 union halls and school auditoriums, in board
21 rooms and community centers, in public squares
22 and in places of worship to call attention to

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1 the problem of domestic violence.

2 Something exciting is happening
3 because of the efforts of people in this room,
4 because of so many others working across the
5 country. When the Kentucky legislature,
6 Republicans and Democrats, asked me to address
7 them to talk about domestic violence and greet
8 me with bipartisan support and congratulations,
9 you know there is something happening across
10 this country.

11 When Republicans and Democrats come
12 together, when people from all walks of life
13 start saying, "What can we do about it?" you

14 know that our efforts are beginning to work,
15 but we can't stop now. We must do so much
16 more.

17 Last week, I was in Cleveland, Ohio,
18 where I met with members of three different bar
19 associations who have joined together to
20 provide assistance to women who come from
21 violent homes. At 2:00 on a weekday afternoon,
22 when they could be putting in billable hours or

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1 drawing fees, there were approximately 100
2 lawyers in that room finding out how they could
3 volunteer to assist and support victims of
4 domestic violence.

5 Later in the week, I spoke at the
6 Justice Department's second annual domestic
7 violence information fair. Again, I was struck
8 by the willingness of so many people to sit in
9 the Great Hall of the Department of Justice and
10 talk to people who came to their section to
11 give them information on their aspect of what
12 can be done about domestic violence.

13 There is an energy, there is an
14 excitement across this land. We are also

15 seeing an increased realization within the
16 business community that they can be a partner
17 in this effort.

18 The word is spreading from companies
19 such as Marshalls and Polaroid and Aetna to
20 companies around the nation that the work place
21 can be an important resource for women who are
22 at risk.

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1 And this is an important partnership
2 for the religious community to consider. I
3 knew from my own experience that the victims of
4 domestic violence were often sought in the work
5 place, that the impact of domestic violence was
6 felt in the work place. It is exciting to see
7 employee assistant professionals who are
8 working together with our office to develop
9 programs to focus on what can be done.

10 Many battered women are working, and
11 while they cannot go to the police or to the
12 hospital because they are afraid, they do go to
13 work. They need colleagues and supervisors who
14 understand their situation and support their
15 efforts to protect themselves and their
16 families.

17 At the Justice Department, we are
18 working to ensure that all of our employees
19 have access to information and resources that
20 can be of real help. In addition to our annual
21 information fair, we also distributed a
22 resource book.

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1 We include the National Domestic
2 Violence hot line number, 1-800-799-SAFE or TDD
3 1-800-787-3224, in our monthly newsletter,
4 "Justice For All," and we recently created a
5 violence against women home page on the
6 Internet.

7 The Justice Department is acting as a
8 resource and a partner for state and local
9 enforcement as we implement the Violence
10 Against Women Act. We are prosecuting
11 batterers who cross state line to avoid state
12 prosecutions.

13 We are providing hundreds of millions
14 of dollars and grants to the states for hiring,
15 and training new police and prosecutors and
16 victim's advocates. We are funding grants for
17 abused women and children in rural America and

18 grants to encourage mandatory arrest policies
19 for the primary aggressor in domestic abuse
20 cases.

21 We are making a real effort to
22 improve the criminal justice system's ability

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1 to deal effectively with domestic violence. I
2 have seen what it is like to have a
3 well-meaning, insensitive prosecutor handle a
4 domestic violence case, and it isn't a pretty
5 sight.

6 What has been so touching, though, is
7 to see in those fifteen years that I served as
8 a prosecutor, a minister or member of the
9 victim's church come with them. Before I have
10 gotten to the case to hear how oafish the
11 prosecutor had been, the minister had already
12 told him or her how to do it a little bit
13 better.

14 We can do so much if we perform
15 partnerships like that, inform them, and if we
16 stand up for the victims. I know from speaking
17 with police chiefs throughout the country that
18 they often find domestic violence incidents to
19 be the most dangerous and difficult encounters

20 they experience on the job.

21 We are helping local departments hire
22 new officers who will use the proven methods of

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1 community policing to focus exclusively on
2 domestic violence, and I have had a chance to
3 meet with community police officers across this
4 nation, people who have come to know their
5 neighborhood, the churches in the neighborhood,
6 the religious leaders, the citizens, the people
7 who care, the teachers. We can do so much if
8 we form alliances to focus on the people in our
9 neighborhood and put them first, all the
10 people.

11 We have got to make sure that they
12 know where to go, and, again, the religious
13 community can do so much. We are also helping
14 to develop training programs for judges and
15 victims' advocates and others.

16 We are developing domestic violence
17 workshops, and programs with such organizations
18 as the National District Attorney's
19 Association, the Police Executive Research
20 Forum, and the International Associations of

21 Chiefs of Police.

22 We are funding a pilot project to

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1 serve as a testing ground to ensure that
2 protective orders are given full faith and
3 credit by police and courts in every state.

4 This nation is on the move. It is so
5 frustrating and was so frustrating for me to
6 see a women move from another state to Miami,
7 terrified, and she'd come to me and say, "Here
8 is my protective order," and I would say, "I can't

do

9 anything with it. We are going to have to file
10 a new one." "But he may already be here, what
11 am I going to do?"

12 It is important that we develop in
13 the criminal justice system a network across
14 the country that will let that one, first
15 protective order be the key for what the rest of the
16 nation requires.

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18 But as this nation is on the move,
19 whether it be domestic violence or other
20 issues, it is so important that the religious
21 community help to contribute to that network

22 and that those persons, as they move, sometimes

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1 move in fear, are given the names of a church
2 or religious leaders that they can go to in the
3 community where they are going that gives them
4 a welcome.

5 Miami was the destination of an awful
6 lot of people on the move, travelling not quite
7 knowing where they were going, adrift when they
8 got there. The more we can do to make America
9 have the sense that it comes home, the better
10 we are.

11 In all of these efforts, we are
12 working as partners, and as partners we are
13 making progress. There are so many networks.
14 Look at the parks and recreation specialists in
15 the park across the street from you. Join
16 forces with him in terms of focusing on what
17 can be done when that child comes into the park
18 and confides to him about what is happening at
19 home. Look at the school teacher who so often
20 doesn't know what to do when the child comes to
21 school in tears and finally blurts out what is
22 happening.

1 The general practitioner in the
2 community down the block, for so long he just
3 sewed up the wound, and he didn't do anything
4 more. Sit down and talk with him about
5 domestic violence, or her, and find out what
6 they do when a victim comes to them.

7 We can't just sew up the wound
8 anymore. We have got to sew up the spirit.

9 Today is the anniversary of the birth
10 of Eleanor Roosevelt. She was fond of saying
11 that it is better to light a candle than to
12 curse the darkness.

13 We know the truth of that statement
14 in the struggle to end domestic violence. In
15 so many ways, candles are being lit today, and
16 the darkness is finally receding for countless
17 thousands of women across this land.

18 Women and families who have lived
19 with the fear and the danger of domestic
20 violence and sexual assault are finding the
21 strength and the support they need to survive.

22 This morning's breakfast is a

1 starting point for the work that will continue
2 in the months and years ahead. Our joint
3 efforts will ensure that the light of those
4 candles will glow until every women living in
5 the shadow of violence finds her way to safety.

6 Working together, there is so much
7 that we can and will do to bring an end to
8 domestic and sexual violence. But even then,
9 some people tell me, "Ms. Reno, you are a nice
10 lady, and you are well meaning, but the job is
11 just too big."

12 And I will take issue with those
13 people for the rest of my life because for
14 three and a half years I have had a chance to
15 visit with the people of this nation, the
16 rabbi, the minister, the doctor, the plumber,
17 the unemployed, the kid in the detention
18 facility, the victims.

19 And never, ever have I felt so
20 confident of the future of this nation. Never,
21 ever have I had such faith in the strength and
22 the courage and the spirit of the people of

1 this nation. And much of the credit for that

2 is due to the religious community, who through
3 so much has reached out to bring America
4 together. Thank you for all that we do.

5 (Whereupon, at 8:25 a.m., the
6 PRESENTATION was adjourned.)

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