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SPEECH OF
ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
PITTSBURGH, PA
MAY 24, 1997

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1 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you for
2 that warm welcome. But more importantly, thank you
3 for what you have done and what you continue to do
4 throughout this country and around the world, in
5 teaching people how to resolve their conflicts
6 without angry words and knives and guns and fists.
7 For teaching people how to solve problems rather
8 than to create problems with divisiveness, teaching
9 people how to talk to each other and how to listen

10 to each other.

11 When I went to law school, I had Roger
12 Fisher for Civil Procedure. I never heard anything
13 about negotiations. It is wonderful to see what
14 you and your colleagues have done to teach us how
15 to negotiate, how to mediate, how to communicate,
16 how to problem solve. You have taught me so much
17 and I simply want to thank you so very, very much
18 and say to each of you, keep at it, it is such
19 important work.

20 I'd like to focus on the issue of social
21 justice and the problem of race in this country.
22 These issues are some of the most extraordinarily
23 important issues that we face. Serious concerns
24 and tensions exist in many places here in
25 Pittsburgh and around the country. We simply must

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1 find ways both to bridge the differences that still
2 seem to divide us and focus on the things that we
3 share. Our challenge is to remind ourselves that
4 we do have common interest, common grounds and
5 common dreams. At bottom, the needs of all those
6 in all communities, no matter what race or culture
7 or ethnic background, are the same. We all want a
8 healthy start for our children, a stable and
9 crime-free neighborhood, quality education,
10 supporting families and decent work opportunities.

11 One of the most moving moments that I
12 will remember from these four years as Attorney
13 General is the opportunity to speak at the 16th
14 Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, on
15 the occasion of Doctor King's birthday. I remember
16 walking in the early morning across the park where
17 the police had responded in that way. All the
18 monuments to those children were there, not just in
19 stone, but in memory for this nation. And then to
20 walk across to the church and to think of Doctor
21 King standing there and to think how far we've come
22 but to still realize that we have so much to do to
23 match the reality to the dream.

24 We must continue to move forward towards
25 Doctor King's vision, towards his dream. We need

1 to examine ourselves and our world with a critical
2 eye and with an open mind. We not only need to ask
3 the difficult questions, but we need to try to
4 answer them. We must talk openly about race
5 relations in this country. We must talk with
6 respect, we must listen to each other. We must get
7 rid of the angry rhetoric that has so marked this
8 issue on so many occasions of late. But we must do
9 more than talk.

10 We must focus on our communities and
11 build from our foundations which are not Washington
12 programs or laws, but people who make the programs,
13 people who build communities, people who bring
14 things together. We must reach across the racial
15 divide. We must heal the divisions caused by
16 intolerance and bigotry. And how do we do this?
17 How do we rebuild a community? How do we weave
18 fabric of spirit and hope and trust around the
19 communities that have sometimes too often unraveled
20 in this day and time?

21 One of our first efforts must be to
22 promote and to try diversity, diversity in race, in
23 native land and religion, diversity in our schools,
24 in our communities, in our workplaces. But too
25 often we live in our insular worlds with each of us

1 enforcing our own voluntary racial separation. We
2 pass each other on the street or in the shopping
3 mall but we don't connect as individuals. With
4 this separation, we risk the lack of understanding
5 of the views and the perspectives of others. We
6 risk not learning of the wonderful, wonderful
7 racial, ethnic and cultural divisions that make
8 this nation so strong and so wonderful.

9 In order to help bridge racial divisions
10 visible in too many of our towns and cities, we
11 need to apply our best thinking and our experience
12 in conflict resolution. We know how racial
13 conflicts in schools, playgrounds, neighborhoods,
14 city halls and work sites can too often rip a

15 community apart and destroy a sense of community
16 spirit and a sense of well being.

17 How do you build community? How do you
18 put pieces together? You start at the beginning
19 with our children. Our children are not going to
20 understand conflict resolution unless they are
21 given a foundation upon which to build that
22 understanding. You recognized it in your program
23 yesterday. To see the areas that you covered is
24 again to recognize just what you have done in
25 understanding how the tools of conflict resolution

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1 can aid us all.

2 The first thing we've got to do is, every
3 one of us, whether we be experts in conflict
4 resolution or a housewife or a mayor or a lawyer or
5 a teacher, all of us have got to make a commitment
6 to seeing that the children of America in those
7 early formative years of zero to five have the
8 health care necessary to grow as strong children,
9 have the child care or educare in those first
10 formative years that can help them understand the
11 difference between right and wrong and help them
12 develop a conscience. Have the educational
13 opportunities to match the challenges of the 21st
14 century, have the supervision in the afternoon and
15 evening hours after school that can help them stay
16 out of trouble and grow as strong, constructive
17 human beings. And then with all of that, let us
18 start teaching them how to resolve conflicts
19 peacefully. You know it better in the subject
20 matter that you covered yesterday. But if we can
21 focus on educare for those very young who are now
22 in child care because both parents are working or a
23 single parent is struggling to make ends meet, and
24 we can make sure that educare specialists
25 throughout this country are all trained in conflict

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1 resolution and how to nurture children and teach
2 them to do it the right way, we will have taken a
3 giant step forward in the foundations upon which

4 this nation can build peace and not dissension.

5 But then we must focus on our school
6 system. And teaching our young people the skills
7 to resolve their own conflicts in schools, in after
8 school programs, in community centers, this is one
9 of the very important things we can offer them
10 because kids start facing conflicts day after day.
11 The earlier they can start to understand that there
12 are positive ways to approach the disputes and the
13 conflicts that are a natural part of life, the
14 earlier they can begin to see that violence is not
15 necessary and the more likely they will be to lead
16 good and productive lives.

17 The skills of really listening, of really
18 communicating, of trying to understand what the
19 other person's concerns are, of negotiating, of
20 looking for alternative solutions, of finding ways
21 to address the situation that serve everyone, these
22 skills are skills that will serve them well for the
23 rest of their lives.

24 I have had the privilege of visiting a
25 number of student mediation programs throughout the

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1 country, but particularly in the Washington, D.C.,
2 area. I have visited with student mediators in
3 over a dozen D.C. public schools in this past
4 year. And it has been a wonderful experience.
5 These were elementary school students, middle
6 school students and high school students. They
7 were all so excited to be part of the program in
8 their schools. They were young people of all races
9 and backgrounds working together to make their
10 programs work. In some instances, they provided
11 diversity training and they were proud of what they
12 had done to develop the program. In several cases,
13 they showed me how their mediation process worked.
14 And it was great to watch them use the skills that
15 they had learned. It was so wonderful to hear them
16 talk about something that gave them control over
17 their lives. And it was so much fun to see them
18 take pride in being able to take their skills home
19 to their families and to their neighborhood.

20 I remember the satisfaction in their eyes
21 as they described how to use their mediation tools
22 to help their brothers and sisters settle fights
23 and even to help their parents. But then it was
24 wonderful to see them talk about mediating with the
25 teacher over a conflict with the teacher and to see

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1 the teacher become so accepting of the process.

2 Last summer I went to mediation programs
3 that were put on for D.C. public school teachers.
4 Here were veteran teachers learning tools that were
5 so important for them for the first time. They sat
6 around and suddenly began to smile and said, oh, I
7 could have used this. I know just the way I could
8 have handled that problem if only I had known. And
9 I suddenly had a dream. If you can take the energy
10 in this room and take the know-how that your
11 colleagues and you have, can't we make sure that as
12 a part of the core curriculum for any teacher
13 graduating from a teachers college or with a
14 teaching degree, that they have coursework in
15 conflict resolution and mediation.

16 And when I thought about it, wouldn't it
17 be wonderful if every one of those teachers or at
18 least some of those teachers were trained to train
19 students, so that as part of every classroom
20 development, there was coursework in conflict
21 resolution. Now, you have got to make people
22 understand because they somehow think you can't
23 teach them. You should invite people to come watch
24 a session and just see how it can be taught and how
25 these tools and these understandings can be

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1 conveyed and demonstrated and you can make more and
2 more people believers. I would love to see these
3 kinds of programs where our young people are given
4 the opportunity to learn.

5 I think you've made it clear in this
6 conference in the quote from Ghandi, let us begin
7 with the children. You have. Let's make sure
8 America does.

9 If you're going to build community, if
10 we're growing to bring communities together, we
11 also have to look at the police. Sometimes you see
12 tensions and anger. Sometimes you see trust and
13 protection. I've seen them both. About ten days
14 ago, I went to a detention facility. I talked with
15 13 youngsters in the detention facility because I
16 always try to talk to them about what could have
17 been done that could have prevented the problem in
18 the first place. They had good ideas, afternoon
19 and evening programs to keep themselves out of
20 trouble, mentors who made a difference and police
21 officers who understood young people and didn't put
22 them down the first time they arrested them.
23 Somebody who understood how hard it is to grow up
24 in this country today, somebody that can give you a
25 pat on the back when you deserve it and somebody

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1 that can tell you you have done wrong when you
2 deserve it.

3 I balanced that picture with the picture
4 of young men who came to Washington to tell the
5 President of the United States how two community
6 police officers had made such a difference in their
7 lives. These police officers had become their
8 mentors when they were on the verge of getting into
9 gangs. And because they understood them, they knew
10 how to talk to them, they knew how to listen to
11 them, had pulled them back and had them well on the
12 road to constructive, productive lives.

13 We have got to make sure, whether it be
14 here in Pittsburgh or around the world or in
15 Dorchester, that we are able to train all our
16 police officers in conflict resolution so that they
17 become the peacemakers in our streets as well as
18 the protectors. Community policing is one of the
19 most exciting initiatives underway. There, police
20 officers reach out to the neighborhood, to the
21 citizens of the neighborhood. They build trust.
22 They consult with them in identifying problems and
23 establishing priorities and reaching solutions
24 together, whether it be the drug dealer down the

25 street, the abandoned car, the vacant lot, the

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1 graffiti on the wall or the elderly citizen who
2 feels too frightened to come out from behind the
3 door. When community police officers build that
4 trust, when they become the peacemakers, that
5 elderly person comes out from behind the door, goes
6 down to the community center, gets involved and
7 helps to solve the problems. We can build step by
8 step if we just let America know how important it
9 is for all of us, whether it be police officers or
10 teachers or Attorneys General to learn how to
11 resolve conflicts in positive, thoughtful ways.

12 But we have got more to do. And it is
13 interesting in the context of Pittsburgh to see
14 what we can do. The vast number of police officers
15 here and across the country have probably one of
16 the single most difficult jobs of anybody I know.
17 They have got to make legal decisions and they
18 haven't gone to law school in most instances. They
19 put their life on the line and some get shot and
20 killed, they don't know which is right. They are
21 put on the line again and again. And they are
22 asked to solve so many problems. It is important
23 that we work together, the Department of Justice
24 and the City of Pittsburgh can jointly file their
25 consent decree covering Bureau of Police Operations

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1 here to address our concerns and the concerns of
2 the community about how police and citizens can
3 work together. Working together, the City and the
4 Department of Justice have identified problems and
5 we have worked together to fix them. I think that
6 this represents an example of how the Federal and
7 local governments can accomplish things when we
8 work together. We hope that this will address some
9 of the issues that have created the tension. We
10 have got to work together to solve problems.

11 It has been wonderful for me to see our
12 very distinguished United States Attorney here in
13 the Western District of Pennsylvania, Frederick

14 Keyman who has coordinated community policing and
 15 cultural diversity training teams made up of both
 16 non-law enforcement representatives and officers
 17 from numerous police departments in the Pittsburgh
 18 area. They provide training to community groups
 19 and to police departments across Western
 20 Pennsylvania. These training teams provide for
 21 increased understanding of the roles of both police
 22 and community and preventing and solving crime.
 23 They also reflect that conflict resolution is a
 24 two-way street. Police need more training on
 25 working with community and the community needs to

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1 better understand how it can work with the law
 2 enforcement sector.

3 But if we work together, if we ensure
 4 that in every basic law enforcement course in this
 5 country there is work on conflict resolution, we
 6 will spread the message even further. We will
 7 spread the message to the workplace. We watch so
 8 many issues arise in dissension of the workplace
 9 because people haven't learned how to communicate
 10 expectations. They haven't learned to communicate
 11 on what should be anticipated. They haven't
 12 learned to communicate so that there is sometimes
 13 the appearance as well as the reality of fairness.
 14 Through conflict resolution, we are learning to
 15 resolve some of the issues of the workplace.

16 We will carry it over to the legal
 17 profession. Lawyers like to litigate all the
 18 time. But there are an awful lot of lawyers now,
 19 including a lot of the Department of Justice who
 20 are learning that you can better represent your
 21 client by resolving the case upfront rather than
 22 drawing it out for four years, spending an awful
 23 lot of money on trial costs that could have better
 24 been put to positive developments.

25 At the Department of Justice we are

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1 working to develop alternative dispute resolution
 2 programs throughout U.S. Attorneys' offices in the

3 country. We are working to do everything we can
4 with client agencies to make sure that they try to
5 resolve the case before it's even referred to us to
6 litigate. We can do so much if we make lawyers
7 peacemakers and problem solvers rather than just
8 gladiators in the courtroom.

9 And so when we talk about social justice,
10 let us think about community justice. We have
11 developed quite an adversary system in our common
12 law traditions. But we can draw from people who
13 were here before us, native Americans who have had
14 the goal of peacemaking rather than blame finding,
15 who use sentencing circles rather than other
16 processes of sentencing, to solve the problem that
17 caused the crime in the first place. It makes no
18 sense for the prosecutor to claim triumph when he
19 convicts an abuser of drugs who has a terrible drug
20 problem and yet doesn't get any treatment. It is
21 of little use for the public defender to get off on
22 a motion to dismiss or a motion to suppress a young
23 man who has a terrible crack addiction and do
24 nothing to solve the problem.

25 Let us all work together through

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1 community initiatives that bring the courts, the
2 schools, the police, probation officers, citizens
3 of the community, activists, parks and recreation
4 specialists, businessmen together to say, what can
5 we do to prevent this problem from occurring
6 again? A little bit of punishment may be
7 appropriate, but there must be after care, there
8 must be follow up. If it is a dispute between
9 youngsters, let us bring public health specialists
10 and conflict resolution specialists in when the
11 fight first starts so that it doesn't repeat and
12 recycle itself through the hospital emergency rooms
13 and through the jails again and again and again.

14 We can do so much if we recognize the
15 wonderful dignity and magnificence in every human
16 being, if only we listen and look and search hard
17 enough to find it. You have taught so many,
18 including myself, so much about how to listen

19 better, about how to talk carefully, about how to
20 solve problems, about how to bring people
21 together. I can't urge you enough to keep on
22 talking, to keep on trying to bring peace to this
23 nation and peace to the world. God bless you.
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