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Speech of JANET RENO
Miami, Florida
July 21, 1997

The speech of JANET RENO given at the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLEE) Annual Conference, Hyatt Regency Hotel, 400 S.E. 2nd Street, Miami, Florida, on the 21st day of July, 1997, at 1:36 p.m., before Susan Arant, RPR.

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S P E E C H

MS. JANET RENO: Thank you, Chief Graham, and thank you one and all, Sheriff Harrison, and all my friends who have made me feel so welcome. Wherever I have traveled in this country, I have seen you in your cities, and I have seen you in your offices and you do this nation proud.

To the people who raised me in law enforcement, it is really so wonderful to come home and to see people that I worked with now almost 20 years, and to think of some of the trials and tribulations we have been through, some difficult times together, and to

13 know that if you keep trying, things continue to work
 14 out right. And it's just a real privilege and an honor
 15 to be home with you today.

16 All of law enforcement in this country
 17 that's dedicated to doing right has done so much in
 18 these last four years. Violence is down significantly
 19 in many American cities and in our suburbs and in rural
 20 areas. Juvenile crime is even beginning to come down
 21 even slightly. But there's going to be more young
 22 people in this country in the next ten years. And we
 23 also see drug abuse on the part of young people
 24 increasing.

25 I think we've shown something in these four

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1 years that's very important, and that is that
 2 professional, caring, dedicated law enforcement
 3 officials who work with others and who show common
 4 sense, who look at the problem not as a Republican or as
 5 a Democratic problem, not with a lot of rhetoric, not
 6 just punishment on one side or prevention on the other,
 7 but a common-sense approach to what's right can prevail,
 8 can make a difference and make a significant difference
 9 for this country.

10 So I say, let's not sit back and say, "Oh,
 11 well, violence is down. We can go home." Let's take
 12 what we've learned in these four years and resolve to do
 13 it better. Let us continue what NOBLEE has done so much
 14 to do, which is to build a trust and respect, the mutual
 15 trust and respect of police officer with young person, a
 16 police officer with fragile victim, a police officer
 17 with a person in the community who at first didn't trust
 18 police but because of somebody in this room started
 19 believing in police and started coming together with
 20 other citizens in the community to make a difference.

21 NOBLEE has taken the lead in showing police
 22 officers and police departments how they can relate, not
 23 just to some people in the community but to everybody in
 24 the community, and become the glue that brings
 25 communities across America together. We can do this

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1 too.

2 And as we look at what we learned in these
 3 four years, let us resolve again to believe with all our
 4 hearts and to demonstrate very clearly that we can

5 prevail in law enforcement, while at the same time
6 protecting the constitutional rights of every single
7 American. We can do it because for so many months and
8 weeks now you and other law enforcement officers across
9 this country have proven that we can enforce the law and
10 do it the right way and make a difference.

11 But let's not sit back. Let's see what we
12 can do better. We've done some good things together.
13 In our anti-violence initiative I asked federal law
14 enforcement agencies not to worry about turf, not to
15 worry about credit, but to reach out to state and local
16 law enforcement across the land to see how we can share
17 information, not as a one-way street but as a two-way
18 street, federal government giving information and
19 evidence to local government where they can prosecute
20 the case better, cross-designating people when
21 appropriate, but doing it based on what was in the best
22 interest of the case and for best interest of the
23 community and not due to credit.

24 I propose that we step back a little bit and
25 look at what we've learned and see how we can use these

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1 lessons and to be more effective. First of all, why
2 don't we just take each community and each city that we
3 represent and analyze what we've got. Okay. We've got
4 a violence problem. Let's work with the Center for
5 Disease Control to understand what the nature of that
6 violence is. Is it gang violence? Is it domestic
7 violence? Is it drug-related violence? Let's
8 understand it and design our law enforcement response
9 with federal, state and local officials working together
10 to effectively focus on the problem.

11 Let us, if it is guns, design systems that
12 can get guns out of the hands of young people and make
13 sure they are in the hands of only those who belong to
14 have them. Let us make sure that we continue to make
15 the Brady system work by responding to the request for
16 gun checks, because we have seen already what difference
17 that act can make in keeping guns out of the hands of
18 people who have been convicted and don't belong to have
19 them.

20 Let us make sure as we diagnose a community,
21 let's look at what we have in terms of information about
22 drug usage. The justice system is producing some very
23 fascinating information, and it will be expanded to 75

24 cities through the new Adam program that is developing
25 that will give us a chance to even more accurately

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1 understand what's happening with drugs. Is it
2 methamphetamines? Is it crack? Is it heroin? How is
3 it organized? Let us analyze together and then design
4 plans that can focus on the type of problem that we are
5 dealing with. Is it a hate crime? Let us look at the
6 statistics. Let us encourage reports. Let us see what
7 patterns exist and let us send a clear message that we
8 will not tolerate hate in this nation.

9 Let us not pull the wool over our eyes. Let
10 us understand the threats that this nation faces and
11 that we have seen. Let us understand the nature of
12 terrorism and how it might develop. But we need in
13 order to do that, we need to insure that there is a
14 partnership between the federal government, who has so
15 much of the information, and state and local
16 authorities. Sometimes we have information that is
17 absolutely essential to preventing problems before they
18 develop.

19 And let us understand that in this world
20 today there are new terrorisms. Attacks on the
21 information infrastructure can bring whole cities to
22 their knees. Let us be prepared in terms of the
23 equipment and knowledge to defend and prevent whenever
24 possible and to apprehend if not successful.

25 And then let us inventory our resources.

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1 What do you have in your city? Each city has a better
2 understanding of your needs and resources than we do in
3 Washington. I never liked the Feds coming down and
4 telling us what to do or what we needed or what we
5 didn't need or what our problems were. I always
6 thought, why don't they come down and listen to us and
7 then tell us what they have and let's see how we can
8 build a partnership. Let us understand what we have in
9 terms of enforcement, in terms of prevention and then
10 let us build a comprehensive plan based on the diagnosis
11 we've made that enables us to respond as effectively as
12 possible.

13 What do we need? One of the things that I
14 think is imperative as we focus on youth violence and on
15 juvenile crime in this country is an understanding that

16 we can make a difference. I go talk to young people. I
17 try sometimes to go to a detention facility to talk to
18 young people who have been in trouble.

19 The sheriff was saying serious offenders
20 that are in her jail, they're all echoing a common
21 thing: What could have been done to keep you out of
22 public in the first place? Something to do in the
23 afternoon and evening that was constructive and
24 positive, and some adult who understands how hard it is
25 to grow up in America today, who can give me a pat on

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1 the back when I need it and give me a firm talking to
2 when I need it. But most of all, an adult who will
3 treat me with respect and enable me to grow with
4 self-respect and dignity.

5 These young people have extraordinary wisdom
6 because some of them have been in that detention
7 facility once or twice. And they tell me that's what
8 you could have done to prevent it. Now what you can do
9 to keep me from getting back in here is make sure I have
10 a platform upon which to return to the community that's
11 not a part of the open-air drug market where they got in
12 trouble in the first place.

13 Let us use the wisdom of the young people
14 and the wisdom that is in this room to design a juvenile
15 justice system that prevents the crime and to give the
16 young person who has gotten caught in the web of crime
17 an opportunity for a safe and positive future. Congress
18 is currently focused on the Juvenile Justice Bill. It
19 is a balanced bill, as the President presented it, but
20 we must all work together to make sure that there is
21 funding for courts, that there is funding for
22 prosecutors, that there is funding for prevention
23 programs for those afternoon programs for conflict
24 resolution programs, for mentoring programs with trained
25 mentors that can make a difference and give our young

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1 people a chance to grow in a strong and positive way.

2 I look forward to joining with you in this
3 effort in these next few days to make sure that we
4 remember the best and our most precious possession, our
5 children. But as we have indicated, the drug usage on
6 the part of young people is increasing. How do we stop
7 that? As we take the information that we have about our

8 communities, as you reach out to the U.S. Attorney, to
9 the FBI facts, the DEA facts, the ATF facts, and design
10 plans focused on your community and what its needs and
11 problems are, let us figure out how we join together in
12 a comprehensive effort that focuses on all the drug
13 dealers.

14 I sometimes think if you count from one to
15 ten, the Feds will handle ten, nine, eight and seven.
16 Local law enforcement will handle one, two and three.
17 And I sometimes think four, five and six float around
18 and attach themselves to everybody else. Let's make
19 sure we get four, five and six together. And let us
20 send the message to the traffickers and the middle-level
21 distributors that there are going to be stiff, firm
22 penalties that fit the crime and that we are going to do
23 it in an effective and comprehensive way.

24 But let us also recognize that there are a
25 lot of people who are arrested for drugs who got the

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1 drug problem. And it doesn't make any sense to send
2 them to jail or to send them to prison or to rotate them
3 through the system only to receive probation if they
4 don't get any treatment and if we just perpetuate the
5 revolving door.

6 Let us work together to develop a coherent
7 plan of firm punishment for the distributors, for the
8 traffickers and a carrot-and-stick approach for the
9 users that says, "Look, we'll work with you or you can
10 face a sanction. Take your choice." We started that
11 here in 1989 in a drug court system that has now spread
12 across the country. There was one drug court. About
13 eight years ago when I came to Washington I think there
14 were about ten. There are now hundreds across this
15 land. And we can build on our experience, learn to do
16 it better, and make sure that we provide treatment that
17 will interrupt the cycle of violence.

18 However, in any such system, the punishment
19 must be fair. If it's not, people don't believe in it.
20 They don't have confidence in the judicial system, and
21 it erodes the effectiveness of anything that we try to
22 do.

23 In 1986 Congress established a ratio between
24 cocaine base, known as crack, and cocaine hydrochloride,
25 known as powder. Our ratio of 100 to 1. Today, under

1 federal law, a first offender who sells five grams of
2 crack must usually be sentenced to imprisonment for five
3 years. The same offender who sells five grams of powder
4 in the federal system will usually only be sentenced to
5 imprisonment for about ten months. That's six times the
6 sentence for the same quantity.

7 I believe that there are differences in the
8 impact of crack and powder have on communities across
9 this land. Crack is clearly associated with more
10 violence, and I think that those who sell it ought to be
11 punished more harshly than those who sell powder. But I
12 don't think that a sentence six times higher is
13 appropriate.

14 I am hopeful, very hopeful, that we will
15 soon be able to propose a rational solution to this
16 problem and that it will be one that NOBLEE can support.
17 We look forward to working with you in this effort. I
18 want it to be one which is fair and which the community
19 believes is fair, yet one which also imposes fair, stiff
20 penalties that fit the crime. I think as we work
21 towards solutions in law enforcement it is imperative
22 that we work towards making sure that all of Americans
23 believe the system is fair.

24 While the streets are safer and fewer people
25 are being murdered, victimized by other serious violent

1 crimes, the incidence of hate or bias motivated crimes
2 is far too high in this nation. The FBI reports that
3 there were 7,947 reported hate crimes in America in
4 1995. I suggest that that number is low, for the
5 victims of hate crimes are often afraid or don't want to
6 report it.

7 I think we can take the same lesson we have
8 learned in our partnerships in other areas and apply
9 them with equal vigor and dedication to the whole focus
10 on hate crimes in this country. Let us develop a
11 systematic outreach to the community so that people know
12 who to call, where to call. Let us develop systematic
13 outreach to victims so that they will not be afraid to
14 report the crime and that they know that they will find
15 support when they do report it. Let us make sure we
16 provide for victim assistance programs and restitution
17 programs that can make a difference.

18 And let me share with you in that regard a

19 warning of a minister with whom we met in June as we
20 analyzed the results of one-year activities in the
21 church arson task force. He said you all have done a
22 good job and we appreciate what you have done, but you
23 have forgotten one group of people. You have forgotten
24 the young people in our churches who have been so, so
25 affected, so hurt by seeing their church burn.

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1 As we look at hate crimes, let us not forget
2 the young people who are the witnesses to these crimes
3 and reach out to give them support and confidence to
4 deal with the tragedy of these crimes. Let us make sure
5 there is a two-way street. I used to get my back up a
6 little bit when we were doing a very good job of
7 investigating a hate-crime case only to hear that the
8 Feds had come to town and they were going to take it.
9 And I wondered what they were going to do with it.

10 Sometimes they poked around for a while and
11 then they were gone, and they didn't come back. What I
12 think we have got to do is make sure that doesn't
13 happen. Sometimes the case is more appropriately
14 prosecuted in federal court because there are federal
15 civil rights statutes that provide for enhanced
16 penalties.

17 Congress and the President have enacted
18 enhanced penalties for hate crimes. What we should do,
19 the U.S. Attorney, the local police, the FBI, the chief
20 of police, is sit down and figure out who can do what
21 best, how we can exchange all information and how we can
22 do it the right way. We have got to make sure that when
23 victims speak out, we act. The eyes of minority
24 communities are upon the system. If a person is
25 assaulted because he is black, a swastika painted on the

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1 house of a Jew, or a person that's beaten up because he
2 is gay, and the victim reports that crime and nothing
3 happens, the victim's initial fear will have been
4 vindicated.

5 We must make sure that we pursue these cases
6 and no matter how small, treat them with the concern and
7 the resources they deserve. We must make sure the
8 penalties imposed by our courts reflect our outrage at
9 the hatred that motivated the crime. When we come
10 together and when we marshal our resources as a nation,

11 we can be so effective and we can make such a
12 difference.

13 Look at the church arson initiative. These
14 fires have been the source of considerable pain among
15 the communities that have lost their houses of worship.
16 The President made it a top priority to investigate and
17 to prosecute those responsible for these crimes to
18 prevent, whenever possible, future damages at houses of
19 worship and to help communities and congregations in
20 their efforts to rebuild and to heal.

21 We have deployed over 200 ATF and FBI
22 investigators around the country to investigate these
23 arsons. The national church arson task force has
24 responded to these crimes by bringing federal resources
25 to bear. I am delighted to see Rose O'Keefe, head of

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1 our Community Relations Service here today and Mr.
2 Atkins as well. The Marshall service was involved. But
3 most of all my message was let us not go in and do it
4 ourselves. Let us go in partnership with state and
5 local law enforcement and do it together.

6 We are committed to expending the necessary
7 resources, the time and effort to solve these crimes,
8 and we are going to keep on working on it until we bring
9 the people responsible for them to justice. Our efforts
10 are paying off. We have investigated over 400 arsons
11 since January of 1995. And with state and local
12 departments involved, we have made arrests of 187
13 defendants in connection with fires at 136 of those
14 houses of worship. This is double the general arrest
15 rate for arsons.

16 The reaction to these fires has been
17 universal outrage across this nation. These effects are
18 rightly seen as a threat to our common sense of
19 sanctuary. They have generated a tremendous response
20 from our community, a solidarity among followers of many
21 faiths, along with donations and countless volunteers to
22 help rebuilding and to prevent further tragedy. It is a
23 wonderful experience to hear a young teenager talk with
24 pride over a trip to the South to help rebuild one of
25 the churches attacked and to hear her talk of the

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1 welcome that was given in that community.

2 This past year I drove down a little old

3 dirt road in South Carolina with the President of the
4 United States to see the site of a church that had been
5 burned. Only a magnificent oak tree, which had half
6 covered the church, still stood. But then we went
7 further on down that road to dedicate the new church.
8 The people of that community, black and white, came
9 together to speak out against the hatred that has fallen
10 that fire.

11 Haters are cowards. When they are
12 confronted, they will often back down. It is so, so
13 very important for all America to speak with one
14 consistent voice at the first sign of hatred, at the
15 first sign of bigotry, and speak out loud and long
16 against it. And there is a sense of community, not just
17 in that South Carolina town, but in all America.

18 Because as I walked down off the platform
19 following the President, a lady burst through the rope
20 lines and gave me a great big hug and she said, "Janet,
21 I haven't seen you since Miami when I used to see you
22 and your mama marching in the Martin Luther King
23 parade."

24 And she said, "I used to run out and give
25 you a hug in the parade." And for those of you who are

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1 not from Miami, my mother and I would regularly march
2 the whole length of the Martin Luther King parade. And
3 mother would say, "What's that they're yelling?" And it
4 was "Child support, child support." Because as the
5 State Attorney I collected child support.

6 And this lady who greeted me said, "You got
7 child support for my children, and I have never
8 forgotten you, and I am so glad I can give you another
9 hug now." And then she turned and said, "These are the
10 two you got child support for." And I looked up. And
11 there were two young men, grown young men.

12 There is a sense of community and a spirit
13 of togetherness in this country that we must build on.
14 We must not let the divisive rhetoric of today destroy
15 that spirit. We must tell those people that power each
16 other and fuss, "We can disagree, but we can work
17 together to resolve those disagreements to make a
18 difference."

19 But there is another challenge that we all
20 face. A little over two years ago I went to Oklahoma
21 City on the Sunday following the bombing. I watched the

22 people of Oklahoma City come together with people from
23 all over the country. And it became clear that this was
24 not just a hate crime in its traditional sense, but
25 terrorism in a terrible sense that we had to confront.

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1 Again, let us stand back and understand the
2 threat. Let us together, state and local law
3 enforcement working with the federal government, take
4 sensible steps to know what can be done to prevent it,
5 how to exchange information, and how to deal with the
6 issue in a comprehensive way. But we have new tools now
7 that stagger the imagination and convert vanity to
8 prayer.

9 When a young man can sit in a kitchen in St.
10 Petersburg, Russia, and with his computer steal from a
11 bank in Miami, we got problems. One might even say the
12 gun will be obsolete in ten or fifteen years. Now, all
13 of you have been to basic law enforcement and advanced
14 law enforcement training and continuing law enforcement
15 training on how to use a gun, but not that many of us,
16 including me, would know how to deal with that hacker in
17 St. Petersburg, Russia. And that same hacker, if he
18 were more intent on more damage, the information
19 infrastructure could give us a run for our money. We
20 must be prepared.

21 And then in these years to come I look
22 forward to working with NOBLEE to develop our knowledge
23 of cyber crime and the tools to match cyber crime that
24 can prepare us for the next century. It's going to
25 require expertise and equipment of tremendous cost. But

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1 if we share and if we work together, if we build a true
2 partnership where state and local law enforcement is on
3 the front line and federal law enforcement is acting
4 according to principles of federalism and what's right,
5 I think we can make a difference.

6 It is a special moment for me to stand here
7 today. Chief, you made mention of the fact that I am
8 the first woman Attorney General of the United States.
9 Today the first African-American Deputy Attorney General
10 is in office for his first full day. I look at what he
11 has done as U.S. Attorney in the District of Columbia.
12 I watched what law enforcement has done across this
13 country to bring us together, not to divide us, protect

14 us, not hurt us, to build a greater, safer and better
15 America. On behalf of all Americans, I thank you from
16 the bottom of my heart for the work you do day in and
17 day out for your agencies, for your communities and for
18 this nation.

(Speech concluded at 2:05 p.m.)

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CERTIFICATE

1 I, Susan P. Arant, a Registered Professional
2 Reporter, do hereby certify that I was authorized to and
3 did stenographically report the speech of Janet Reno,
4 and that the foregoing pages, inclusive, constitute a
5 true and complete record of my stenographic notes.

6 IN WITNESS WHEREOF I have hereunto set my hand
7 this 22nd day of July, 1997.
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Susan P. Arant, RPR