



Remarks for the Attorney General

American Association of University Women

Washington, D.C.

June 19, 1999

Thank you, Sandy Bernard, for that kind introduction. My thanks also to Maggie Ford and Augustine Pounds. You are all doing such wonderful work.

In fact, I should be the one applauding you. You are doing so much to improve the lives of women and girls in this country. As we face the challenges of the next century, your messages of leadership, empowerment and the need for diversity could not be more timely or important.

I'd like to speak with you about some of the challenges I see for all of us, and the power of partnership to meet those challenges.

Across the country, communities are proving that when schools, businesses, law enforcement, and community leaders work together, they can reduce crime, make their communities better places to live, and give our young people a future. I am determined to build upon these successes and do what I can to bring this spirit of partnership to every city and town around the country.

At the Federal level, we have resolved to form a partnership with communities. We have funded and encouraged new community strategies - community policing, innovative crime prevention programs, community courts. I have

encouraged Federal prosecutors and investigators to work closely with their local counterparts, and to reach out across disciplines to work with educators, the faith community, and other local leaders.

The Administration and Congress have taken steps to reduce violent crime, such as passing the Brady Act and the Assault Weapons Ban. And we have mounted an unprecedented effort to get illegal guns off the streets. We have expanded the Nation's drug court programs, and have supported states in the fight against domestic violence. But throughout the last six years, I have seen over and over again that the key to success is the people of each community-the power of people who care, their energy and commitment.

As a result of these combined efforts-at the federal, state and local levels-violent crime has dropped six years in a row, to its lowest level in three decades. Murders have fallen by more than 20% in larger cities and suburban communities. The juvenile crime rate is down for the second year in a row. America has really turned a corner in our fight against crime, and the results are being felt by communities across the country.

But we must keep at it. We cannot become complacent. In the past when crime has come down for a year or two, we got complacent. There is still too much violence. Too many children have to pass through metal detectors to go to their classrooms. Too many share their playgrounds with drug dealers. And, too many parents suffer the loss of a child at the hands of gangs and guns.

There has been, and still is, a culture of violence in this country. Let me tell you what I mean: In the five years from 1992 through 1996, the city of Chicago recorded 3,063 gun-related homicides. By contrast, the city of Toronto, Canada - a city of comparable size and demographics, just over the border - had exactly 100 gun homicides in the same period.

It does not have to be this way. Americans can be secure in

their homes, on their streets, and in their schools and places of work. Together, we can solidify the gains we made in the 1990s. Together, we can press forward and have a lasting impact on the culture of violence in this country.

Today, I come before you with a challenge-to harness the power, ingenuity, and resources of women and the educational community to press our advantage in the fight against crime, to end the culture of violence in this country, to use the prosperity of today to build a better future for tomorrow, and to raise new generations of Americans prepared to live and work in the 21st Century.

We have a golden opportunity right now in America. By virtually any measure, Americans are experiencing unprecedented economic prosperity. Now is the time to act. We can renew our efforts, strengthen our partnerships, use common sense in analyzing crime problems and designing strategies to solve them, and watch crime go down. We can keep politics out of crime fighting - after all, crime is not a Republican or Democratic issue - and we can watch crime go down. And if we all work together - public officials, advocacy groups, business leaders, law enforcement, and residents - we can and will see crime go down.

This is a tremendous challenge, but one we must accept and meet. With the benefits of our information age and our high technology economy come the risk of creating two Americas. An America that is part of the exciting economy, and benefits from it, and an America that is left behind.

During the past six years, over 18 million new jobs have been created. As of April 1999, there were over 127 million jobs in the United States. Unemployment was at just 4.2 percent, the lowest in 40 years. And the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that employment will increase by 14 percent between 1996 and 2006.

But there is another, darker side to this equation. While unemployment is at its lowest rate in years, the opportunities available to many minority group members have

not been lifted by the rising economic tide. The unemployment rate for African-Americans is still 7.7 percent-twice that of whites. African-American men between the ages of 18 and 25, in particular, are among the most economically disadvantaged of any group in American society. Over 23 percent of young African-American men with a high school diploma or less are unemployed. And the Economic Policy Institute reports that nearly 40 percent of this group are "underemployed"-in other words, they would like to be working full time, and are available to work, but have not been able to find full time work.

The same group is also at the greatest risk both for criminal victimization *and* involvement in the criminal justice system. In the midst of our Nation's prosperity, we have both a responsibility and an opportunity to make sure that the economic expansion extends to the most economically disadvantaged and vulnerable of our citizens, and that no one is left behind.

And it is in all of our interests to do so. The unskilled and unemployed are responsible for a significant portion of the crime in this country. Over 40 percent of the Nation's prison population never completed high school. About 36 percent of our jail population was unemployed prior to their most recent arrest, and nearly half of this group had a monthly income of less than \$600. Given the right opportunities, however, the economically disadvantaged could become part of the work force that fills the jobs and maintains America as the strongest country in the world. Just as we have seen many economically disadvantaged individuals go from welfare to work, so too can we see progress with the unemployed.

In short, what these facts plainly tell us is that we are all in this together - whether you are running a business or a police department, a university or a prison. I would like to offer five steps that you can take to help you get started and get involved.

First, participate in your community. Any community that is serious about fighting crime has got to start by getting

organized. The community needs schools, after-school programs, neighborhood associations, church groups, law enforcement, and a committed business community all working together. I urge you to talk to your police precinct captain, the mayor, your U.S. Attorney and District Attorney, and find out if any coalition or partnership exists in your community. Don't reinvent the wheel. If a partnership has been formed, join it. If there is none, help organize one.

Too often, turf battles, political divisions, or simple inertia keep key players in the community from coming together to address public safety or other problems. You can help ensure that everyone is at the table - the schools, city and county officials, social and health services, police, federal agencies - and that all of these players are working together.

Second, identify your community's crime problems, its resources and needs. I do not need to tell all of you that information is key to sound decision-making and planning. Work with your partners, and with local universities, to study your local crime problems. Find out what types of crimes are occurring and where, review statistics and trends, crime mapping information, and talk to residents, police and prosecutors.

We may all know that a particular neighborhood is crime-ridden, but it takes a careful review to sort out the problems that need to be addressed. Who is committing crime? Is crime concentrated on certain blocks or at certain times of the day? Are rival gangs causing the problem? Are too many kids hanging out on the streets in the afternoons and evenings and finding their way into trouble? Are there abandoned buildings that are becoming magnets for gangs or drug dealers?

Third, use your skills to help develop a public safety strategy for the community. As a member of the partnership, you bring a unique set of skills to the table: the ability to develop a performance-oriented plan to address community needs, the ability to put aside political and ideological differences, the ability to build consensus for a balanced

and comprehensive strategy that includes prevention, intervention, and solid enforcement.

You can be an effective and powerful advocate for your community. You have credibility and influence with the public and with government officials. You can use that influence to educate the public about serious public safety issues, or to testify before the city council or state legislature about needs that are going unmet in the community.

Fourth, recognize that to build a safer community, you have to build a better community. Crime is not just about guns and drugs. Part of building a safe community is building a better quality of life. We must renovate housing, beautify parks, and rebuild community centers. In doing so, we will be improving the appearance of the neighborhood, building hope, reclaiming the neighborhood for those who live and work there, and helping to end the cycle of decay and violence.

Finally, help build a future for your community. You can insure that your community has the essential building blocks to prevent crime and to pave the road to a better future. The building blocks can be radically different in size and shape, but together they provide the sort of comprehensive approach that we so desperately need.

Start by working with children. We all know that most children who are well educated and raised in a supportive and healthy environment do not grow up to become criminals. They become productive members of society. We must give all of our children quality child care programs, strong schools, and productive after-school programs. And we need everyone's help-as mentors, tutors, and volunteers-to get kids to stay in school and raise their sights.

A crucial part of quality care for children is quality mental health services. The assessment and effective treatment of mental illness in criminal and juvenile justice settings, as well as in schools of all levels, is invaluable in our effort to prevent and reduce crime - and

promote the healthy development of this vulnerable population. Our potential for success in this area lies in collaboration. Practitioners in education, criminal justice, mental health, substance abuse and support services can accomplish so much more by working together for people with mental illness.

We must also train the unskilled and displaced workers of today, and build a trained workforce for the future. Eight of ten of the fastest growing jobs in the next decade will require a college education or moderate to long-term training. We need to start preparing for these new jobs today. Provide basic skills to workers so that they will be ready to tackle the next set of challenges and demands. Improve basic adult education, high school completion programs, and offer training in computers. The opportunity to get a good job is one of the best antidotes to crime.

Finally, I ask that you continue your vital work to promote diversity in education and elsewhere. I was particularly impressed by a University of Michigan study which confirmed that diversity in higher education improves students' education, racial understanding, cultural awareness, cognitive development and leadership skills. For that very reason, we believe that institutions of higher education should have the flexibility to develop and implement admissions programs that consider an applicant's race or ethnic background as one element, weighed fairly with others, to further the compelling educational goal of a diverse student body.

Now, more than any other time, it is our job to build on our successes of recent years. We must benefit the communities where we live and work, and ensure that no one is left behind. Please join me in this crucial work.

Thank you.