



Department of Justice

STATEMENT OF

**ERIC H. HOLDER, JR.
ATTORNEY GENERAL**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

ENTITLED

“OVERSIGHT OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE”

PRESENTED

APRIL 8, 2014

**Statement of
Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr.
Before the Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
April 8, 2014**

Chairman Goodlatte, Ranking Member Conyers, and Members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the recent achievements of the U.S. Department of Justice; to join you in advancing our ongoing priorities; and to thank you, on behalf of my hardworking colleagues in Department offices around the world, for your continued commitment to the cause of justice and the missions we share: securing our nation and protecting the American people.

This is, and will always be, our top priority. And over the past year, the Department has done important work in this regard – strengthening our ability to safeguard America’s national security, to disrupt potential terrorist plots, and to ensure that those who attempt to harm our nation, its vital interests, or its people can be held accountable to the fullest extent of the law. Last month, the Department achieved a major milestone when we secured the conviction of Sulaiman Abu Ghayth, the son-in-law of Usama bin Laden and a senior member of al Qaeda, on terrorism-related charges.

This verdict has proven that proceedings such as these can safely occur in the city I am proud to call my hometown, as in other locations across our great nation. It was appropriate that this defendant, who publicly rejoiced over the attacks on the World Trade Center, faced trial in the shadow of where those buildings once stood. We never doubted the ability of our Article III court system to administer justice swiftly in this case, as it has in hundreds of other cases involving terrorism defendants – and this outcome vindicates the government’s approach to securing convictions of senior al Qaeda leaders. It would be a good thing for the country if this case has the result of putting that political debate to rest.

Beyond our national security work, the Department will continue to build on the progress we’ve made in confronting a range of other threats and challenges – from combating drug and human trafficking to preventing and addressing cyber-attacks; from upholding the civil rights to which *everyone* in this country is entitled, to leading the federal-government-wide implementation of the Supreme Court’s decision in *United States v. Windsor*.

These comprehensive efforts reflect our commitment to integrity and equal justice – in every case and circumstance. And nowhere is this commitment stronger than in our work to strengthen America’s federal criminal justice system. Through the Smart on Crime initiative I announced last August, my colleagues and I are taking action on a number of evidence-based reforms – including modifications to the Department’s charging policies with regard to mandatory minimum sentences for certain nonviolent, low-level drug crimes. This commonsense change will ensure that the toughest penalties are reserved for the most dangerous or violent drug traffickers. And I’m pleased to note that Members of this Committee have shown tremendous leadership in the effort to codify this approach into law.

I've been proud to join many of you in supporting the bipartisan Smarter Sentencing Act – introduced by Representatives Scott and Labrador and cosponsored by Ranking Member Conyers – which would give judges more discretion in determining appropriate sentences for people convicted of certain federal drug crimes. And I pledge to keep working with leaders like you – and like Senator Rand Paul and others – to address the collateral consequences of certain convictions, including felony disenfranchisement policies that permanently deny formerly incarcerated people their right to vote.

Under the Smart on Crime initiative, the Department is also directing resources to diversion programs – such as drug courts and community service initiatives – that can serve as alternatives to incarceration in some cases. We're supporting 17 states, led by governors and legislatures of both parties, in diverting resources *away* from prison construction and *toward* evidence-based initiatives that are proven to reduce recidivism while improving public safety. And we're increasing our focus on cutting-edge reentry programs that can better enable formerly incarcerated individuals to return to their communities as productive, law-abiding members of society.

We will never be able to simply arrest and incarcerate our way to becoming a safer nation. That's why we need to be both tough and smart in our fight against crime and the conditions and behaviors that breed it. And this struggle must extend beyond our fight to combat gun-, gang-, and drug-fueled violence – to include civil rights violations and financial and health care fraud crimes that harm people and endanger the livelihoods of hardworking Americans from coast to coast.

Last November, the Justice Department secured a major victory in this struggle when we obtained a \$13 billion settlement with JPMorgan Chase & Co. – the largest settlement with a single entity in American history – to resolve federal and state civil claims related to the company's mortgage securitization process. As part of our ongoing efforts to hold accountable those whose conduct contributed to the mortgage crisis, the Department also filed a lawsuit against the ratings firm S&P. And with the \$1.2 billion agreement we reached with Toyota just last month – the largest criminal penalty ever imposed on an automotive company – we're making good on our determination to protect consumers and address fraud in *all* its forms.

Moving forward, my colleagues and I will continue to build upon these and other important efforts. And we'll keep working alongside Members of Congress, including Ranking Member Conyers, Representative Sensenbrenner, and Representative Lewis, to address the void that has been left by last year's Supreme Court decision invalidating one of the Voting Rights Act's core provisions – so we can help protect that most basic right of American citizenship.

I thank you, once again, for the chance to discuss these and other priorities with you today – and for your continued support of the Justice Department's critical efforts. I look forward to working closely with you to build upon the public safety and law enforcement accomplishments my colleagues have made possible in recent years. And I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.