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PREPARED REMARKS FOR
ATTORNEY GENERAL ALBERTO R. GONZALES
ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY SPEECH

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Good morning.

Just more than a year ago, I was here in the Great Hall introducing myself after being sworn in as Attorney General. My respect and admiration for the dedicated men and women who serve in this Department has grown even stronger. You make me proud every day, and I thank you for your constant efforts on behalf of the American people.

When I reflect on this past year – and the important role of the Justice Department in the issues that impact our society – I am reminded that we are the stewards of the American dream.

Last year, I greeted new citizens at a swearing-in ceremony in New York, and promised them that we would work hard to protect their newly acquired right to vote.

I flew to Iraq to thank the men and women of our armed services, and welcomed back members of the Justice Department who helped establish a fledgling justice system from the ashes of that dictatorship.

I visited Ad Max – where I observed the terrorists who bombed the World Trade Center in 1993 and other evildoers the Justice Department has helped remove from society – and then watched the very next day as the terrorists struck again with attacks on subways and buses in London.

I met victims of domestic violence at the opening of a Family Justice Center in Saint Louis – a center that will help others like them find assistance during their moments of greatest need.

With my wife, Rebecca, I toured the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and heard horror stories of families whose children had been abducted – and later announced greater Justice Department participation in the AMBER Alert system to help find these abducted children faster.

The American dream is about living and prospering in a secure, lawful, hopeful, and safe society. And it is a dream that for many years has been protected in large part by the actions and activities of men and women just like you.

For generations, this Department stood tall when the American people most needed a champion for justice. The Justice Department walked arm-in-arm with black students who wished to attend public college in the south. And each time history called upon the Department to address the seminal

issues of the day, the finest group of agents, investigators, lawyers, and prosecutors answered by staring down mafia dons or dismantling Colombian drug cartels that were poisoning our children.

Today, the mantle of responsibility has been passed to us. As Attorney General, I find myself asking important questions about our moment in history:

Are we doing all we can to prevent another terrorist attack? Are our neighborhoods safer? Are fewer people participating in the destructive life of drugs and gangs? Is the Internet safe for our children? Are we succeeding in stamping out illegal discrimination? Do our public and private institutions operate with integrity?

These are the questions that I use to measure our progress.

My goal is simple: Secure the opportunities of the American dream for all Americans and for future generations. Keeping this charge is no small task and it will require no small effort. And I am well aware that I can't do it alone – I will need your help.

So, today, I'm laying out a set of priorities and initiatives to guide our work for the coming year. This plan will allow us to continue the progress you've helped to achieve – most notably, four years without another terrorist attack here at home and a violent crime rate that is at its lowest level in more than three decades.

Now, you and I have an opportunity to strive together as a team for even greater success – success built upon the Justice Department’s historic role in securing the American dream.

Our nation is safer today, but al Qaeda remains lethal. Osama bin Laden’s deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, said just weeks ago that the American people are – and I quote – “destined for a future colored by blood, the smoke of explosions, and the shadows of terror.”

Our enemy seeks to destroy the American promise of liberty and prosperity – they stand in the way of peace and progress. We have no higher calling than the protection of our fellow citizens – stopping terrorism is priority number one.

One way is through successful prosecutions. We had dozens of convictions in terrorism-related cases last year alone, including Zacarious Moussaoui for his role in a plot to fly airplanes into buildings, and Ali Al-Timimi in the “Virginia Jihad” case.

This year, we will work to prevent another attack by staying on the offensive, working hard to detect the enemy’s plans, bringing known operatives to justice, and increasing our efforts to disrupt their ability to use our open society as an invitation to attack. I should note that we expect to continue to be aided by the USA Patriot Act, which Congress is poised to renew. We will then be able to stand up the new National Security Division to better coordinate our anti-terrorism efforts.

In addition to the fight against terrorism, the Justice Department will focus on five priority areas in the coming year: violent crime; drug trafficking; cyber crime; civil rights; and public and corporate corruption.

These priorities are not new. They are fundamental indicators of the American dream. Nor is this list comprehensive. But we will work in these areas because our success is vital to the health of that dream in the 21st Century.

Every American deserves to live free from the fear of violent crime. We remain focused on reducing gun crime and liberating communities from the stranglehold of gang violence.

The effects of violence and gang activity reverberate beyond individuals – beyond a single perpetrator or a single victim. When a young man is murdered, an entire community feels the loss. When a young girl is raped, an entire neighborhood is violated.

But our efforts to combat crime reverberate as well – the effects can be felt far from a courtroom or a prison cell. Putting gang members behind bars means mothers and fathers don't have to install bars on their windows and doors...or put restrictions on where their children can walk or play. Locking up violent offenders means we're freeing communities to pursue the American dream.

We're reducing gun crime across the country through the President's Project Safe Neighborhoods program. In the past

five years, federal firearms prosecutions are up nearly 73 percent – and almost every one of these gun criminals serves time in prison. Over the same period, the violent crime rate has fallen to its lowest level in 30 years. It makes sense. When gun crime equals hard time, it's a good sign for the community.

As part of Project Safe Neighborhoods, we've established Violent Crime Impact Teams in 22 cities – and we will add more this year. These teams are designed to identify a community's worst offenders, work together with local officials to take the bad guys off the street, and give back the neighborhood to law-abiding citizens. This effort complements the work of 128 FBI-led Safe Streets Task Forces focused on anti-gang enforcement.

It is now time to capitalize on our success under Project Safe Neighborhoods and turn our attention to the specific problem of gang violence.

In too many communities, young boys choose to join a gang rather than a little league team or a Cub Scout troop. Gangs shatter the dreams of those who succumb to their false promises and wreak havoc on nearly everyone in their path.

The Department-wide gang strategy I announced last summer is in full swing – I've received comprehensive plans from every U.S. Attorney's office. They contain specific solutions to specific gang problems in each area, but one thing is consistent almost across the board. Over 90 percent of the U.S. Attorneys are already using some part of their Project Safe Neighborhoods program to combat gang violence. We want to build upon that approach, and use the strategies and partnerships with state and local law enforcement pioneered under PSN to shut down violent gangs in America.

Accordingly, in the coming weeks, the Department will announce 10 million dollars to support PSN's gun crime reduction programs and another 30 million dollars to expand PSN to include new and enhanced anti-gang efforts. This money will go directly to programs to build on results already being delivered at the local level.

I am also pleased to announce that we will launch a new anti-gang program in six cities that will help us to combat some of the worst, most violent gangs in the country. This comprehensive initiative will focus on three areas: prevention, targeted enforcement, and prisoner re-entry.

We'll start with prevention – working to address the personal, family, and community factors that cause young people to choose gangs over better, safer, and more productive alternatives. The more success we can have in this area, the fewer people we'll have to prosecute for violent activity down the road.

Unfortunately, there will always be a need for enforcement. So the second part of the program will provide grants to help law enforcement target the most significant violent gang offenders – and lock them up so that they can no longer threaten their communities.

Lastly, we want to ensure that offenders returning to society don't go back to their violent ways. This new initiative will support mentor-based re-entry assistance that includes everything from transitional housing and job placement to substance abuse and mental health treatment. We will also expand the Bureau of Prison's Life Connections program that

provides life-skills education in concert with each prisoner's spirituality or faith. When offenders get a second chance to give up illegal guns and violence, we have a responsibility to arm them with the skills and support they need to pursue the American dream.

When we talk about violence – especially keeping our children safe – we often fear what can happen as they walk to school, or play on a ball field, or stand on a busy sidewalk with friends.

But in today's world, our children are not always safe once they come inside. They can log onto the Internet and open themselves to new and hidden threats.

The Internet must be safe for all Americans, especially children. That's why we are committed to ensuring that there are fewer places on the Web where our children are in danger.

On the federal, state, and local level, law enforcement is already focused on this growing problem. Here at Justice, the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, working with prosecutors and law enforcement agencies, has increased convictions for child sex crimes over the past year.

But numbers and convictions don't tell the whole story. A ten-year-old girl can read an email expecting to open a picture from her grandmother, and find obscene or pornographic images. A child can enter a chat room expecting to talk with friends or connect with peers in other states or countries, and inadvertently end up the target of a sexual predator.

That is why I am pleased today to announce a major initiative: Project Safe Childhood.

The goal of Project Safe Childhood is to prevent the exploitation of our kids over the Internet – to clean up this new neighborhood just as we've worked to reduce gun crime on our city streets. We'll do it using the same successful approach as Project Safe Neighborhoods – with unprecedented coordination by law enforcement at every level.

United States Attorneys, in full partnership with existing local Internet Crimes Against Children Task Forces, will bring together community stakeholders and work closely with them to develop a strategic plan based on the individual needs of their communities.

These Project Safe Childhood Task Forces will then share resources and information to investigate and prosecute more sexual predators and child pornographers than ever before. And they will coordinate in seeking the stiffest penalties possible, to be sure we keep these criminals away from our children.

This effort will also be coordinated with ongoing nationwide operations. When the Criminal Division or the FBI takes down a commercial website or server, for instance, they uncover hundreds or thousands of leads that local Project Safe Childhood Task Forces can track down in their own districts. Sometimes, this work requires specialized techniques, and Project Safe Childhood will help facilitate training for officers and prosecutors, with assistance from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, the ICAC program, and others.

Finally, we have to get parents involved. They are closest to the problem, and can be a big part of the solution, just by looking over their children's shoulders while they surf the Internet. Project Safe Childhood will help ongoing efforts to raise awareness and to equip parents and children with the tools and information they need to become responsible Internet users, so that they can explore this limitless frontier for the opportunities of the American dream.

Even as advanced technologies help cultivate new dreams, too often those dreams are wiped out by the pitfalls of illegal drug abuse.

No community will fully prosper if drug abuse is rampant. That's why we will continue to dedicate ourselves to dismantling drug trafficking organizations and stopping the spread of illegal drugs.

The fundamental building blocks to the American dream – an education, a job, a family – are in jeopardy for those who only care about getting high. And drug abusers bring their friends and families along for the downward spiral. Meanwhile, large-scale organizations – some as sophisticated as legitimate corporations – continue to profit from this illicit trade while our communities pay the price.

There is good news. Drug use among young people continues to decline. The bad news is that illegal drugs are still finding their way across our borders, onto our streets, and into the hands of our nation's citizens – young and old.

Last year, we arrested the two founders of the Cali Cartel and two Afghan drug kingpins with ties to the Taliban. And we continue to have success pursuing high-priority drug networks. In 2005, we dismantled six of these organizations and disrupted the operations of six more. But there is more work to do.

As I talk with U.S. Attorneys and local law enforcement officials, I hear the same thing over and over again – methamphetamine is destroying lives and causing collateral damage in our communities.

Law enforcement has done a good job of shutting down small meth labs here in the United States – dangerous operations in basements and suburban homes. Last year we announced the results of Operation Wildfire, which led to more than 400 arrests and dismantled more than 50 labs. In the process, agents rescued 30 children from meth-infested homes.

Now, we have to expand our efforts to target Super Labs outside of our borders. Meth is manufactured in large quantities in Mexico, but the finished product comes back to the United States through illegal drug trafficking routes.

In the coming year, we will continue to combat meth production here at home. And we will work with our international partners to cut off overseas production and trafficking of meth and the chemicals used to make this highly addictive drug.

Forty years ago, the color of your skin was as much of an obstacle to the American dream as violent gangs, sexual predators, and drug dealers are today. We've come a long way from that brand of state-sponsored racism, but we must continue to safeguard the civil rights that are fundamental to the opportunities we cherish in this country. As the first Hispanic Attorney General, I am personally concerned about this struggle – as is President Bush.

All Americans should have the same chance to pursue their dreams by earning a job, finding a home for their family, voting for their representatives, and living safe from fear and servitude. We will continue to aggressively combat discrimination wherever it is found.

The Civil Rights Division has had record levels of enforcement to protect the right to vote, to ensure the disabled can fully participate in their communities, and to provide the highest standard of care for institutionalized persons.

And we're vigorously working to stop one of the most pernicious evils imaginable – human trafficking. It happens more often than you might think, right here in America. The Civil Rights Division is cracking down on human traffickers who buy and sell young women and girls, and force them to work as sex slaves and prostitutes. We can be proud of a more than 300% increase in human trafficking prosecutions during this Administration.

In the coming year, we will build on these successes and more. The right to vote is fundamental to the American dream. So we will push for reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act –

one of the most significant pieces of civil rights legislation in our history.

We will also renew our commitment to fair housing – another key element of the American dream. We will help open doors for people as they search for housing, not allow discrimination to serve as a deadbolt on the dream of safe accommodations for their family. To that end, I am proud to announce Operation Home Sweet Home – which will refocus and expand the Civil Rights Division’s Fair Housing Act testing program.

We will investigate suspected offenders with testing visits designed to expose discriminatory practices. Over the next two years, we will bring the number of these targeted tests to an all-time high, ensuring the rights of all Americans to fairly obtain housing.

Because of the struggles of my parents and grandparents, I care deeply about civil rights in America today – about the African-American family that is denied the right to vote or the Mexican-American couple who can’t get decent housing. I care about applying the law to everyone equally, so that everyone has an equal opportunity to pursue the American dream.

Millions of people come to America every year to pursue that dream because of the rights and liberties we’ve guaranteed for generations. And our government and economy are the envy of billions more because we have systems that are open, honest, fair, and dependable.

Integrity in government and business are essential for a strong America...taxpayers and investors deserve nothing less. That's why we will strive to preserve the integrity of our public institutions and corporations.

The American dream is in many ways an economic dream, as many people hope to start a business, build a home, improve their community, or invest for a better future down the road. In some areas of the world, such dreams can only be pursued with bribes, kickbacks, and coercion. But here, our unique commitment to the rule of law allows ordinary citizens to rely on – and expect – the honesty and integrity of government officials, corporate executives, and other holders of the public's trust.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, we've seen the best and the worst of our open society – charitable contributions by the millions but also thousands of cases of fraud and corruption uncovered by the Hurricane Katrina Task Force.

At every level – federal, State, and local – we're enforcing the laws that protect the integrity of our government and corporate institutions. I've told prosecutors to operate with one principle in mind: No one is above the law... not a city councilperson, a CEO, a member of Congress or an Administration official. We will not allow public officials to misuse their office or mispend taxpayer dollars. And we will hold corporate executives accountable for the duties they owe to shareholders.

This list of priorities is not exclusive. We have other responsibilities that are no less important to the American dream.

Enforcing our immigration laws will help us remain an open and welcoming society, by cracking down on illegal activity and closing our borders to criminals and terrorists.

Advocating for a tough and fair sentencing system will give teeth to our enforcement objectives, improve our deterrence efforts, and ensure that every American is treated fairly before the bar of justice.

Protecting intellectual property will help preserve our nation's economic security and our competitive advantage in the world.

And I will continue to advocate energetically for adequate resources so that we can accomplish our objectives. With whatever resources we obtain, we will work smarter, better, and more efficiently, which are the hallmark traits of good government and public service.

I am confident that next year at this time, I will stand here and report that we've made great progress on these priorities and initiatives. The extent of our success is up to you. We will all be proud if we can look back at 2006 as a year in which the American dream was more attainable by more people than ever before.

Before I was confirmed as Attorney General, I was with President Bush at one of his speeches. He was getting ready to walk out to the podium, and he looked at me and asked: “Are you ready?” I knew what he meant and what he expected of me...and I ask each of you the same question. Are you ready?

Each of us has lived the American dream. We’ve made the most of the opportunities secured for us by members of the Justice Department who sat in these very seats and who worked hard during their moment in history. Our stewardship of America’s promise will honor their efforts and write the story of this generation.

I look forward to our future work together in service to the American people and in pursuit of the American dream.

Thank you.