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ATTORNEY GENERAL ERIC HOLDER

Speaks at 13 California Cities Network on Gang Prevention

HOLDER: Thank you, Jack. I appreciate your kind words, and I'm grateful for your outstanding leadership. Your commitment to the success of this network -- and to our nation's young people -- is clear. Not only have you delayed your retirement; you've also agreed to a demanding travel schedule that takes you across the country, and all around this state, every month. Your work is making a difference here in California. And your guidance is helping today's Justice Department meet its obligations to combat crime, to protect the safety of our communities, and to ensure that all Americans have the opportunity to improve their lives and fulfill their potential.

I'm here today to discuss the work, and the responsibilities, that we share. Responsibilities to ourselves, to each other, to our communities, and to the alarming number of children and young people who have been victims of, perpetrators of, and witnesses to gang violence.

This conversation is critical. I want to thank Mayor Johnson for hosting us. And let me thank each of you for your participation and engagement. In the cities you lead, and in the communities you serve, the next chapter of our nation's history will be written. Our future progress depends on our current priorities. It depends on today's commitment to empowering the next generation of Americans. And it depends on our ability to confront our nation's most overwhelming and intractable challenges, including the prevalence and consequences of gang activity and the devastating impact of childhood exposure to violence.

Every person here understands what we're up against. Whether you work to shape policy, to create support programs, or to advance policing efforts, your dedication is inspiring. And I'm grateful that this network brings together such diverse partners. You've proven that, to succeed in protecting the safety and potential of our children, we need a variety of perspectives; we need to test multiple strategies; and, above all, we need a comprehensive, collaborative approach.

By working in partnership, you've helped to create peace in some of California's most dangerous and divided neighborhoods. You've helped enemies find common ground. You've helped to raise spirits, and prospects, in our most vulnerable communities. And you've lifted up countless young people who were heading down dark, dangerous paths. Quite simply, you have worked miracles.

The mayors, police chiefs, law enforcement officers, service providers, researchers, educators, and donors in this room are innovators in the administration of justice. And I'm grateful to count each of you as partners. You have provided the Justice Department with valuable insights from the front lines. You've told us what works, what doesn't, and what we must do to enhance public safety. And, as you've created new programs and field-tested new strategies, you've shown that, despite budget and infrastructure challenges, solutions are possible.

In just three years, this network has made meaningful, measurable progress in addressing gang activity and community violence. Each city in this network has developed and implemented a comprehensive strategy. And many have seen crime rates fall. Yes, we should celebrate these achievements. But we must also face facts. Today, far too many of our children are in need and in pain. Too many kids have given up on themselves and given in to a life of crime. Too many communities are ravaged by gang violence. Too many families have been destroyed. Too many lives have been lost. Children like 11-year-old Mynesha Crenshaw, who was killed by gang-fueled gunfire in San Bernardino last year, in her own home, as she and her sister were making dinner. Children like 6-year-old Azahel Cruz, from Monterey,

who was also killed at home by a stray bullet. Children like Josue Lopez-Gil, who -- just one year out of elementary school -- was murdered by a 13-year-old classmate affiliated with a street gang in Oakland.

Each one of these children died for the same, senseless reason. They were, as Monterey's Deputy Police Chief Kelly McMillin put it, unlucky to be caught between two groups of young men who simply don't like each other...who, if challenged on the point, would doubtless be unable to describe the source or reason for their hatred.

So how do we honor these victims? How do we hold their killers accountable? And how do we prevent future tragedy?

These questions can't be answered easily or quickly. But we can -- and we must -- begin to answer them by coming together, by sharing what we've learned, and by being clear about what's working and where we need to improve.

For me, combating gang violence, and helping children who've been exposed to such violence, has been both a personal and professional concern for decades. As a prosecutor, as a judge, as a U.S. Attorney, and as the Deputy Attorney General, addressing the causes and remedying consequences of violence was at the forefront of my work. Today, as Attorney General and as a parent, it remains a top priority.

It is also a top priority for this administration. In fact, in the President's Budget for fiscal year 2011, \$12 million in new funding has been requested specifically for gang and youth violence prevention efforts and programs. But, as important as these investments are, addressing the challenges before us requires more than simply moving money out the door.

Of course, we must continue to strengthen our law enforcement capacities and capabilities. And we must build on the work that law enforcement officials, in partnership with our U.S. Attorneys' Offices and Justice Department prosecutors, have done to take violent offenders off our streets. But law enforcement can't do it alone. As Jack often says, we can't arrest our way out of this problem. Achieving the progress we need to make demands that our enforcement efforts are complemented by strong prevention, education, and intervention initiatives.

Putting gangs out of business and providing young people with opportunities to improve their lives will take time. It will also take unprecedented, community-wide cooperation. We need to find ways to help young people resist the allure of gangs through programs like Ceasefire, Peacekeepers, and Youth Corps. And we need more of the city-wide task forces that have been so successful in San Jose, Santa Rosa, and other cities.

We also need more programs like Summer Night Lights, which Mayor Villaraigosa established in Los Angeles. Last year, I had the chance to see this initiative in action. They're literally turning the lights on in the parks where crimes often occur and offering recreational, educational, and artistic activities. This approach is having a positive effect, and it's an example of the innovative approaches we must adopt.

We also must develop more evidence-based strategies for combating crime and use data to target our policing efforts in hot spots of criminal activity. We also need to engage more non-traditional crime fighters -- more public health officials, parents, and teachers; more non-profit and faith-based groups; and more young people. Finally, we need to focus greater attention on early childhood experiences -- and, specifically, on the impact of childhood exposure to violence.

Last fall, the Justice Department released findings from our National Survey on Children Exposed to Violence, the first comprehensive look at children as victims and witnesses of crime, abuse, and violence from infancy to age 17. The survey concluded that most children are exposed to violence in their daily lives. It was a wake-up call for the Department -- and, I know, for many of you.

The study found, for example, that the majority of our kids -- more than 60 percent -- have been exposed to crime, abuse, and violence. Two in five children have experienced direct violence more than once over the course of a year, and nearly three in ten were assaulted at least once in that period. Ten percent of children have suffered some form of abuse or neglect, and one in sixteen has been victimized sexually. In measuring indirect exposure, the study found that one in four children have witnessed a violent act, with many seeing one family member assault another.

This problem affects each one of us. And effectively addressing it must become our shared concern and cause.

But the good news is that, today, there is good cause for optimism. Research has shown that early intervention is effective in countering the effects of violence. Quality programs have shown clear benefits in enhancing resiliency and fostering healthy child development -- benefits that extend to children who've suffered frequent exposure to violence. In other words, it's within our power -- within your power -- to help the kids who need us most.

At the Department of Justice, we have made an historic commitment to this work. I'm proud that, for the first time, the Department is directing resources for the express purpose of reducing childhood exposure to violence and raising awareness of its ramifications, advancing scientific inquiry on its causes and characteristics, and, of course, countering its negative impact.

Last month, we announced that \$5 million in grants would be awarded under the children's exposure to violence initiative by this fall. And the Administration's budget request for the next fiscal year includes an additional \$37 million to help us provide critical resources, research, and services for communities nationwide.

While I'm encouraged by these new investments, and by our collective work in combating gangs and reducing childhood exposure to violence, I can't pretend that addressing the challenges before us will be easy.

My predecessor, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, once said that, It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope.

Today, as I look around this room, I can't help but be keenly aware that each one of you has sent forth many, many ripples of hope. By your actions, you have demonstrated your commitment to solving a problem that, simply put, will determine the future of course of our country. Together, I believe we can

write a bold new chapter in our American story. And I believe that we can transform our nation for the better -- one city, one community, and one child at a time.

Thank you.

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