

Remarks of Attorney General John Ashcroft
[International Association of Chiefs of Police \(IACP\)](#)

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
October 24, 2003

Thank you for that kind introduction, Joe [Samuels].

It is my great pleasure to be here with you in Philadelphia, a place so fitting for this conference. Philadelphia stands tall and magnificent in the imagination of Americans everywhere -- and for good reason. This city has hosted so many important events and so many important dates: July 2, 1776, the vote in Congress for independence. July 8, 1776, the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence. [My father's birthday]

It was here in 1776 that the first flickers of freedom became a blaze of glory and a light for the world. Philadelphia stands as a stirring reminder that freedom cannot survive unless guided by the compass of noble ideals. It cannot endure without men and women of action, who are willing to sacrifice to defend it.

You are standing on noble soil.

From the moment Thomas Paine arrived in America, he knew this was a special land. What he heard and what he saw in the debates on the busy streets of Philadelphia, in candle-lit taverns, and in raucous elected assemblies was our nation's faith and trust in an ennobling ideal: freedom. Americans believed in a culture of ascending opportunity -- in the magnificent potential of a life blessed by liberty and protected by the rule of law.

As Americans fought tyranny to secure this bold, transformational vision of freedom, Paine wrote, quote, "We have it in our power to begin the world over again." He believed, quote, "The cause of America is, in a great measure, the cause of all mankind...."

Two years ago, we met under the dark cloud of September 11. At that time, we had learned that America and freedom were once again under attack. We came face to face with an enemy that believed their war would lead to a new world -- a world where intolerance and tyranny stifle freedom and justice.

In those first dark and uncertain days, the men and women of law enforcement took up a new and formidable challenge: stop the plots of terror and protect the lives of the people. You took up this challenge without forgetting your duty to fight crime on America's streets.

Today, we can celebrate the results and successes borne out of your teamwork and professionalism.

Thanks to the cooperation and communication of leaders in this room, we are making steady progress in the war on terror. And even as we are keeping Americans safe from terrorism, we are winning the fight against crime.

I thank the International Association of Chiefs of Police for your role in these twin successes.

The facts -- and facts are stubborn things -- speak for themselves.

Fact No. 1:

In the past two years, no major terrorist attack has been perpetrated on our soil.

Fact No. 2:

Today, our nation's overall crime rate is at a thirty-year low.

Stop for a moment and consider what these results say about your teamwork and tactics: You have saved lives.

Your work has meant that in the last two years, rapes and sexual assaults are down 25 percent.

It means that in the last two years, attempted theft has fallen 22 percent. Assaults have dropped 20 percent; and robberies have plummeted 27 percent.

Your hard work has meant that almost one million fewer Americans were spared the pain and anguish of being victimized than in 2000.

And the good news about crime is not limited to just one group.

Not only has crime declined, but the violent crime victimization rate has fallen for all racial and ethnic groups, across all income levels, in every part of America.

We are winning the fight against crime. We continue to make steady progress in the war on terror. But we must not pause or retreat now. We would do well to remember Thomas Paine's words, quote: "Danger and deliverance make their advances together, and it is only the last push, in which one or the other takes the lead."

The 30-year low in crime is not an accident. After two decades of watching crime rise, we now know what works. The answer seems simple and obvious now, but it was not always so.

New York Governor George Pataki once joked that he had discovered the "root cause" of crime. The answer, he said, is criminals.

He is right: to reduce crime, we need to reduce the number of criminals committing crime. To do this, we know that we need the best tools, constant cooperation, and tough, effective penalties.

Our success is built on three key tactics: First, tough penalties help us crack cases and put criminals behind bars. Second, effective prosecutorial tools help us investigate and prosecute the lawless and predatory. Third, cooperation, information sharing, and decisive action help drive success.

First, tough penalties.

Two years ago, President Bush made a commitment to reduce gun crime by getting gun criminals off the streets with Project Safe Neighborhoods.

In just the two years of Project Safe Neighborhood's existence, thanks to your efforts, federal gun prosecutions have increased by 36 percent. At the same time prosecutions are up, the incidence of gun crimes is down 32 percent. Thirty-two percent. Gun crime has been reduced so dramatically that last year just seven percent of violent crimes were committed with a firearm. This is the lowest number of violent crimes committed with a firearm ever recorded. The lowest ever.

Tough penalties show that there are real consequences for predatory and lawless behavior.

The era of revolving-door justice is over and it will not return.

Our new sentencing guidelines show we are committed to treating every crime seriously, every criminal justly, and every victim compassionately.

Not long ago, criminals could receive wildly different sentences for the same crime. So Congress enacted federal guidelines for sentencing based on a simple fact: the amount of time a criminal spends in prison should depend on the severity of his crime and his criminal history. It should not hinge on the judge who sentences him.

Building on the success of tougher sentences, I issued recently new guidance to federal prosecutors. Like federal judges, federal prosecutors nationwide have an obligation to be fair, uniform and tough.

Federal prosecutors now have guidance to ensure that they charge and pursue the most serious, readily provable offenses supported by the facts in each case. Except in limited, narrow circumstances, victims, as well as their criminal perpetrators, will see our nation's ideals of equal justice under the law made a reality.

The new guidelines also require federal prosecutors to charge hard-hitting sentencing enhancements against hard-core criminals. Repeat offenders, child predators, criminal bosses, drug kingpins, and violent gun criminals should face the toughest charges and spend the most time behind bars.

We know who the real sources of crime are: the lawless. The predatory. The repeat offenders. Take these criminals off the streets and we will reduce crime. We will save lives.

Tough penalties express the desire of the American people to see justice done. But to catch these criminals, everyone in this room knows we need effective prosecutorial tools.

The right prosecutorial tools are the second key tactic. Nowhere has that been more apparent than in the war against terror. After September 11 Congress united and passed the Patriot Act to give the justice community the tools to detect, disrupt, and dismantle terrorist operations.

Under the Patriot Act, we have been able to use the proven tactics and technologies used in the fight against organized crime and drug smugglers. With the common-sense reform of "roving wiretaps," we have been able to track the communications of those terrorists who switch phones to avoid detection. Under the Patriot Act, we can ask for important business records that might lead to important clues. And thanks to the Patriot Act, under a federal judge's supervision in critical cases, we can conduct an initial search of a terrorist organization without tipping off members of the operation.

From New York to Oregon, from Michigan to North Carolina, we have dismantled terrorist cells all across America. We have brought criminal charges against 286 individuals. We have secured convictions or guilty pleas from 153 individuals.

Even with the right tools and tough penalties in place, our strategy of prevention would be useless without the third pillar of proven tactics: Cooperation.

Over the last two years, support and help for law enforcement has soared. Your dogged pursuit of justice and defense of freedom is rewarded by the faith citizens place in your efforts to keep them safe and secure. The result? More Americans are reporting crimes and cooperating with law enforcement than ever before.

Cooperation has allowed us to build a stronger justice community dedicated to the prevention of crime and terrorism. And cooperation is bringing in the support of a vigilant, informed citizenry.

President Bush has repeatedly challenged the American people to get involved to reclaim their neighborhoods and build a more compassionate society. Millions have answered

that noble call. Thanks to you and the president's USA Freedom Corps, 36,000 citizens are volunteering time to more than 600 crime-fighting programs in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

In partnership with the Justice Department, citizen volunteers give time and knowledge to local law enforcement, helping with translating, clerical work, and other key support areas. This volunteer effort puts officers on the beat and allows them to focus the successful crime-prevention tactics that have helped us reach an historic 30-year low in crime.

We are weaving a web of prevention while protecting the autonomy of citizens in their communities. We are protecting our neighborhoods. We are reclaiming our streets.

In the war on terror, too, we have seen cooperation inspire new alliances, ideas, and information sharing.

We resolved, long ago, that in the war on terror, the justice community would not just fight harder, we would fight smarter.

Thanks to IACP, we have taken valuable steps toward our common goal of "intelligence-led policing."

After looking at the recommendations of the [Global Justice Information Sharing Advisory Committee](#), I am pleased to announce that I have just approved the [National Criminal Intelligence Sharing Plan](#), a direct result of recommendations made at the IACP summit held in March of 2002.

With the plan formally in place, we can build on the communication, coordination, and cooperation that are winning the fight against crime and the war against terror.

In addition, we are moving forward with the Law Enforcement Information Sharing Strategy. The Justice Department, under my direction, has made it a priority to share timely and accurate information among DOJ agencies -- FBI, DEA, ATF, Marshals, US Attorneys -- and with local law enforcement. The Justice Department will be seeking your input to ensure:

- We break down unnecessary barriers to information sharing, and
- We are directing our technology investments wisely to collect, analyze, and disseminate information, quickly and accurately.

Using effective prosecutorial tools, tough penalties, and new and better sources of information, we have shown that the greatest strength of a free people is moral resolution. When leaders inspire action and courage, Americans can accomplish anything.

Philadelphia is America's city of resolve. Here the brave leaders of the Revolution pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor to protect their fellow citizens and stand up for the cause of liberty. Many of that generation lost their lives. Many more lost their fortunes. None lost his honor.

Their deeds remind us that freedom is never free. It can only be earned -- earned by citizens willing to dare and endure, fight and persevere, labor and sacrifice for something greater than themselves. To quote Paine once again, "Those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom must ... undergo the fatigues of supporting it."

We have the privilege of feeling that fatigue. We know that it is a fatigue that can be recuperative: at times our bodies may tire, but our hearts and minds are ever strengthened.

Thank you for your sacrifice. Thank you for your love of liberty and your dedication to the rule of law. I am grateful I have the opportunity to work with you in this great cause of justice.

God bless you and God bless America.

###