



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
REMARKS BY THE HONORABLE JANET RENO  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES,  
AT CEREMONIES COMMEMORATING  
WORLD AIDS DAY 1999  
Auditorium  
Department of Justice  
810 Seventh Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C.  
Wednesday, December 1, 1999  
(4:09 p.m.)

P R O C E E D I N G S

GENERAL RENO: Thank you. I'm honored to be here today to join the Department of Justice and the Corporation for National Service in its World AIDS Day commemoration.

It is a special honor to have Senator Wofford here and thank you very much, sir, for joining us; and to welcome the staff of the Corporation and area Americorps members.

To the Americorps members, I salute you.

You make such a difference in so many communities across America, and we just appreciate it very, very much.

My personal welcome to Ms. Wilson-Byrom, Ms. Smithwick, and Mr. Johnson, and I'd like to thank Ms. Lum in advance for your contribution, which I think will be very special.

I want to say a special thank you to the National AIDS Fund for working with us on this year's World AIDS Day program.

Since 1993 the Department has participated in World AIDS Day observations.

We have also sought to educate Department members on issues related to HIV and AIDS in the workplace, and we have required training for our managers so that they better understand how to deal sensitively and thoughtfully with the issue in the workplace.

We hope and I hope with all my heart that these efforts continue to build a workplace environment which is supportive, understanding, knowledgeable about HIV and AIDS and how it affects everyone in this country.

Since 1993 when I took office, there have been many advancements in the treatment of AIDS.

Yet, in the United States it is still the second leading cause of death for adults in their working years.

And although scientists have yet to find a cure or effective vaccine, we know that the spread of HIV virus which causes AIDS can be stopped.

However, despite all of our scientific knowledge, U.S. health officials estimate that there are approximately 40,000 new infections each year.

Let me share a few more statistics with you.

According to the American Association of World Health, between 650,000 and 900,000 Americans are infected with HIV

or have AIDS.

This is about one in 20 people. Over 6.2 million children worldwide have been orphaned due to AIDS.

With the focus of our World AIDS Day program, it should be noted that the proportion of AIDS cases among women has tripled, from 7 percent in 1985 to 22 percent in recent studies.

As a workplace issue, AIDS continues to have repercussions.

Federal agencies have felt the loss of tremendous talent since the epidemic began.

Coworkers have had to cope with the loss of colleagues, family members, and loved ones.

Unwarranted fear and ignorance have impacted the lives of those living with HIV and AIDS and still does.

However, there is hope on the horizon.

Every year we inch closer, just a little bit closer, to a cure, and medical advancements give people more tools to fight this epidemic.

As an employer, the Department of Justice not only forbids discrimination on employment matters based on one's HIV status, we also enforce the law.

From a legal perspective, AIDS has generated more individual lawsuits across the broad range of health issues than any other disease in history.

Let me say how proud I am of the job the Civil Rights Division is doing in enforcing the Americans With Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act, both of which include challenging HIV-related discrimination.

But the best way to challenge discrimination, the best way to eliminate it, is to educate people so that they do not

discriminate, so that they understand the nature of the illness, and so they know how to deal with it.

Then if after we educate them, after we give them the chance to understand what it means in terms of common humanity, if they continue to discriminate then we must enforce the law as vigorously as possible.

The Department of Justice also joins the Corporation for National Service and other federal agencies, state and local governments, and private companies in taking a leadership role in HIV-AIDS education and voluntarism.

We encourage managers to deal appropriately and compassionately when an employee is affected by AIDS.

We encourage employees to learn more about problems so that they may be supportive of colleagues, friends, and loved ones and supportive in an informed and thoughtful way.

We encourage pro bono legal voluntarism within organizations, such as the Whitman-Walker Clinic.

As I mentioned earlier, over 40,000 Americans will become infected with HIV this year.

Of those, one-half will be under the age of 25.

70 percent of the newly infected women will be African American or Latino.

The 1999 theme for World AIDS Day focuses on acknowledging the impact of AIDS on women.

AIDS is equal opportunity.

It does not discriminate.

It affects our children, our coworkers, our future employees.

AIDS affects each one of us.

I encourage all of you to join in protecting the rights of those living with HIV and protecting those at risk by encouraging continuing education and community service.

In these ways, we can all work together towards ending the silence caused by AIDS.

In 1993, at the Department's first World AIDS Day commemoration I was honored to hear an attorney from the Office of Information and Privacy, Gerry Rumer, speak about his experiences living with HIV.

He was eloquent, he was dear.

He reached people who were in that room that day.

His struggle with AIDS came to an end a few years ago. At other commemorations we remember Jim Douglas, a Justice Management Division employee who helped enlighten our employees by assisting with the development of the Department's HIV training programs.

When we dedicated a Names Project Quilt panel in honor of Charles Parr, created by his colleagues in the Office of Attorney Personnel Management.

Today let us remember those voices, remember those people, those people that we call coworkers, friends, and loved ones, with a moment of silence, please.

(Moment of silence.)

(Piano music by Ms. Lum.)

GENERAL RENO: Thank you so very much.

Emily Dickinson is one of my favorite poets.

One of her lines is: "That we only come this way once is

what makes life so wonderful."

Life is so wonderful and we must cherish each one.

She also wrote: "I know how the sun rose,

one ribbon at a time." For each life, let us remember our ribbons, and save them one life at a time, until we have won the battle against HIV and AIDS.

(Applause and, at 4:20 p.m., end of remarks.)