

TRANSCRIPT OF THE G8 JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS MINISTERIAL PRESS CONFERENCE

(Washington, DC) May 11, 2004 - **MR. ASHCROFT:** Good afternoon, and thank you for coming. Today, I had the pleasure and with the European Commissioner for Justice and Home Affairs, it's a pleasure to have had the opportunity of sharing together with these individuals common concerns and opportunities.

Today's meeting was the third meeting that I've had the privilege of participating in and working together with the G-8 Justice and Home Affairs Ministers. I look forward to these opportunities to meet with my counterparts from around the globe to discuss urgent threats to public safety that exist for our countries.

Every official attending this meeting seeks the same objectives, through the same methods greater safety and security for our citizens through closer, smarter, faster cooperation respecting liberty.

Our efforts come from a shared belief that national security is indivisible from international security. We recognize an international threat that demands an international response. We understand that the best of intentions means nothing, unless those intentions are supported by comprehensive cooperation in fighting terrorism and international crime.

As recent events in Madrid, Istanbul, in Russia, and elsewhere confirm, the evil plots of those who would disrupt civilization know no boundaries.

The fight against terrorism must not be limited by our borders. We understand that we cannot fight these threats separately. If we expect to emerge safer and more secure, we must fight together.

As a result, global law enforcement, communication, and cooperation, which was already strong prior to 9/11, has expanded while the relationships between our respective agencies have grown even stronger. The simple fact is that law enforcement cannot be carried out internationally without the cooperation of other nations, but we must do more, and that is what we addressed at today's meeting.

First, we discussed ways to ensure that our legal frameworks can permit effective law enforcement action that prevents terrorists from acting on their plans.

This means building on our successful cross-border sharing of intelligence and focusing on investigations of a broad range of terrorist supportive activities, including the recruitment of potential terrorists.

Second, we considered ways to prevent terrorists from exploiting weaknesses in the immigration process.

One such vulnerability is lost or stolen passports. We will work on increasing international participation in the database regarding lost and stolen blank passports. It's a problem that is a threat to the security of individuals. The database is maintained by Interpol, the international police supportive agency.

Third, we discussed ways to impede the ability of terrorists to use the Internet and escape detection. Today, thanks to the earlier work of the G-8 enforcement experts and ministers, there is a network of almost 40 law enforcement agencies from 40 different nations around the world that provide 24/7 around-the-clock contact in each country for urgent Internet investigations.

At our meeting, we discussed increasing these capabilities even more, and we will seek ways to strengthen domestic laws that criminalize misuse of computer networks.

Finally, we agreed to fight corruption and to help recover national assets that are stolen by corrupt foreign officials.

A few corrupt leaders are alleged to have stolen billions during their misrule, and since many of the world's largest financial institutions are in G-8 countries, we can play a significant role in helping recover these criminal proceeds, proceeds that should have been devoted to the public good that went into the coffers representing private greed.

Government, corrupt governments create environments where criminal and terrorist organizations can flourish. Fighting the scourge of corruption promotes stability, contributes to security as well as prosperity. As always, I have enjoyed this opportunity to meet with my fellow Justice officials. I have profited from hearing their perspectives on these issues. I look forward to working with them in common, to work toward our common goal of overcoming the great challenges that our nations face.

It will be my pleasure now to call upon Tom Ridge, who acted as co-host for the meeting, to make remarks. Tom.

SECRETARY RIDGE: Thank you, John.

First of all, I join with our Attorney General in expressing our gratitude for the presence and the participation of our colleagues from the G-8.

As many of you know, this is the first time that the G-8 meeting included a representative from the United States from the Department of Homeland Security, inasmuch as this department is slightly more than a year old, but the collective wisdom of the ministers of -- Legal Ministers, those who serve in a similar capacity as the Attorney General, and Ministers of Home Affairs, Counter-Terrorism, and the collective wisdom during the past two days, as discussed both publicly and privately, made it very clear to me that also a collective will to come at the many challenges of international terrorism within the G-8 community, to hopefully lead a broader discussion as well as, within the international community, reaching to some international conclusions that will enhance the security of the entire world.

It was pretty clear, if I might just make a couple of brief observations from my participation, that the men and women representing their countries here understood that terrorism anywhere weighs heavily on the hearts of those of us who live and work and enjoy the benefits of freedom, wherever -- wherever we may reside.

It is also our collective responsibility to do something about this scourge of international terrorism, and that's very much been driving the agenda of the G-8 since September 11th of 2001.

There are a couple of notions that I would share with you around which there is universal agreement that the threat of international terrorism is not unique to any of the individual countries here. We accept it as a potential to occur. It has occurred in many of our countries, but that potential to rear its head again certainly exists, but not only within the G-8, but there's an understanding among these countries that it is a worldwide potential.

It is also a collective understanding that because of the globalization of our world, of transportation, of commerce, of communication, of education, that it is in our collective interest that we keep our doors open to each other and to the rest of the world, but again, we work in a collective and collaborative spirit to make sure that the borders are secure.

And to that end, we also agreed, and again, this is such a powerful statement, that it is in everyone's best interests, again, the collective view, the collective aspiration that as we go about setting standards that will enhance our security of our own individual countries, we need to set these standards in a way that enhance security of all countries, and to that extent, it is generally agreed that as we reach for biometric standards, as we look for ways to authenticate the identity of people, or to verify the authenticity of documents, that the G-8 take a leadership role in identifying what those biometric parameters would be and the technology that we would only -- not only in the G-8, but encourage our colleagues from around the world to use, as well.

We agreed that it's in our collective interest to deal with the various challenges surrounding port security. There's been much discussion and much support among the G-8 countries with the Container Security Initiative that the United States began well over a year ago, but it involves far more than that, and again, it is the judgment, the group's judgment, that we all have a role and all have a need to deal not only with the security of the ports in the United States but in collective port security and ship security around the world.

We agreed that sharing information, and particularly, as General Ashcroft mentioned, lost and stolen passports -- certainly, there is a huge industry around the world with regard to fraudulent documents.

When you couple that with lost and stolen passports, which have enabled people to violate our borders and to -- basically, had we known they were coming across them, would have not been welcomed, it's something where we need to look for ways to share that information as quickly as possible so we can take the necessary action if one of them were used to gain unlawful access to cross our borders.

Again, I think the extraordinary tone of this -- these two days was about the integration of countries. The Department of Homeland Security is tasked with the integration of the different levels of government and the private sector within the United States, but the G-8 meetings over the past few days have really, in a very profound and public way, talked about the integration of nations as we go about seeking collective answers to our collective security challenges in a global world where each and every one of these countries seeks to keep its doors open, but it's more secure, and I'm confident that with the statement that we issue today and the plan of action ahead, that the action of this group will not only lead to more security for these eight countries, but an enhanced security for all the countries of the world.

So I thank my colleagues for the opportunity to participate today, and their enormous contribution to the security of the entire world.

MR. ASHCROFT: I would at this time invite any other one of the ministers from any other country that want to make remarks to do so.

MR. ASHCROFT: Are there questions that you would like to ask?
Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Andre Sevranski (phonetic) TASS News Agency of Russia.
You had separate meetings with your Russian counterparts, and how would you describe those meetings, and in general, how would you describe the level of cooperation between U.S. and Russian law enforcement agencies?

And secondly, you might be aware of the latest terrorist attack in Chechnya in which the President of the republic and five other people died, and have your Russian counterparts been given any specific information regarding terrorist activities in Chechnya? Thank you.

MR. ASHCROFT: Well first of all, I'm delighted to have the opportunity of meeting with Procurator General Ustinov when I have been in Russia before. I'm delighted that he has come, and with the Minister of Interior from Russia to come, and we will be, I believe, meeting additionally.

I have -- as you notice; I mentioned in my remarks at the news conference today the recent events in Russia. I think those of us who looked at the New York Times, I believe it was yesterday, were -- could not help be struck by the picture, the one picture at one moment which showed the leadership of the region sitting together, and the next picture, that area devastated as a result of the explosion.

I would characterize our meetings as being most valuable, our cooperation as being fruitful, and something for which I am grateful. We look forward to finding ways of improving our ability to serve the international community constantly.

Let me just say that I appreciate the contribution made by our Russian counterparts in the meetings today. In particular, I found them instructive and I intend not only to have listened to the translation, but I intend to get a transcript so that I can follow them more carefully.

Terry?

QUESTION: For the American delegates and anyone else who may wish to comment, There is some horror today that, on this day when you're meeting here, that in Iraq, one of the terrorist leaders, al-Zakawi, is claiming credit for a truly brutal killing of a U.S. citizen, and so my question to you, Mr. Ridge, and any others who wish to comment is, in your discussions about fighting terrorism, was there any discussion about whether the apparent abuse of Iraqi prisoners will make it more difficult in the U.S. or even Europe to counter terrorism?

Was there any discussion about that, and if there wasn't, is there any concern about that, sir?

MR. ASHCROFT: Well, I can speak for myself that the abuses which have been revealed are appalling, and I think that is understood, and as we have had a chance to speak one with another, I think we all, the members of the civilized community, are appalled by abuses.

The United States is a big country, and sometimes it makes serious mistakes, and the United States has investigated those mistakes and shared its responsibilities for those mistakes with the world.

We will correct those mistakes, and we are obviously not the kind of people who endorse those mistakes. We would correct those mistakes.

We are not the kind of country that would hide those mistakes or that those mistakes would be a common practice in our country.

There are regimes that have had a practice of doing things that are reprehensible. That is not the practice of the United States.

And as I speak for myself, and I cannot speak for the rest of this community here, I believe the United States is appalled by those practices and that we will correct them.

SECRETARY RIDGE: I think the Attorney General has expressed quite well the feeling of the men and women with whom we've had these discussions, and certainly the belief within the Administration.

I think we need to understand that al-Zakawi or none of the other terrorist leaders have needed in the past any particular provocation for their deadly, destructive designs and conduct.

I think it's also very important to note that, as the Attorney General mentioned, there has been within our system, within the democracies that have pledged their collective effort to deal with international terrorism, within unique institutions of those democracies are means and ways to,

one, share this kind of conduct that we all find so abhorrent with the international community, and a system of justice here, the Uniform Code of Military Justice, that ultimately holds the -- holds people accountable and merits and warrants punishment, depending on the severity of the misconduct.

So we are -- this conduct is open for the entire world to see, and certainly there's been a great deal of commentary on what was done and what was done wrong. Hopefully, there will be similar commentary as the United States addresses and redresses this horrible, this unconscionable conduct in a very unique and very democratic way, open transparency with accountability and consequences.

QUESTION: Pat Reber from the German Press Agency.

I note the absence of the ministers or representatives from Germany and France, and I'm wondering if you could comment on that, please.

MR. ASHCROFT: Well, I was delighted that both nations sent their ministers, Minister Schily, the Minister of Interior from Germany, and Minister Zypries, they were both here. They participated actively in all of the sessions, the three plenary sessions, and in the informal events. They were scheduled to fly back to Germany and left a very short time ago.

Minister de Villepin from France followed them shortly after they left, to be a part of his travel schedule, as did Minister Perben, the Minister of Justice from France.

Each of those ministers made significant contributions and participated actively in the meeting, and we were delighted to have such a thorough involvement of ministers from the G-8, but in those countries, the ministers themselves were here and were active in participation.

QUESTION: Sabrina Cohen from AP (inaudible).

One of the points that you highlighted was fighting corruptions, and you mentioned that most of the most important banking systems are on the G-8 countries, but unfortunately, most of the money are hiding not on let's say Italian or German (inaudible) but like Switzerland tax shelters.

How do you intend to fight those kind of, let's say corruptions, because the money sometimes is not on, let's say, Western banks?

MR. ASHCROFT: Well, let me just thank you for the -- for the question about corruption.

I believe that corruption is a tremendous tax on the poor. It takes the resources that were designed to build roads or schools or other infrastructure on which poor people have an opportunity to build a path toward prosperity and freedom, and it takes money from the public good and places it in private greed.

In the United States, we have individuals who, and situations that are under investigation here. I recently delivered a check to one of our South American government friends that resulted in funds that we were able to confiscate and return to the ownership of the people of that nation, rather than have them reside in our financial institutions for the benefit of the person who had been involved in greed and corruption.

Now, the G-8 community is a leadership community. This organization does not purport to be a world organization, but when the G-8 acts, it influences the activities and conduct of others.

Most of us participants in the G-8 recently signed the UN Convention against Corruption, which was signed in Merida, Mexico. I personally attended that convention signing ceremony in Merida, and I've personally made it an element of emphasis that we would fight corruption.

So I believe that the steps taken by the G-8 are leadership steps. When we do locate assets and when there is adequate proof of those assets having been the product of corrupt activities, we can return those assets to the cultures from which they were stolen, to the governments, so that they can be applied to the people.

There are, obviously, times when the assets are not resident in our banks, but that means we have to fall back on other organizations, and those signatories of the UN Convention, and frankly, I think well over 100 nations, or right in the neighborhood of 100 nations, have signed the UN Convention, so we're making significant worldwide progress with a worldwide consensus that corruption is a tremendous weight on the poor of the world and we need to fight it in a coordinated way.

QUESTION: General Ashcroft, do you have any reaction to the videotape that surfaced today of the murder of an American, and will the Department of Justice get involved in trying to track down the perpetrators?

MR. ASHCROFT: I have not seen the videotape. The murder of Americans is always a matter of concern to us. The terrorists have been doing everything they could to murder Americans on a day-by-day basis, but before I try to make any specific comment on the tape, it would be inappropriate for me to do so without understanding it more fully. We've been involved in these meetings today.

We take very seriously, though; the murder of individuals, and obviously it's my responsibility as it relates to items that come within the jurisdiction of the American law relating to the protection of American citizens. And so I would leave it at that level.

QUESTION: Kimberly Halkett from Global News Canada. I actually have a question for Canada's Justice Minister, Mr. Cotler. I'm just wondering what you feel Canada's contribution will be to the sort of collective global fight on terror. And my second question is, also I'm wondering, given your extensive background in human rights, where you weigh in on this issue of the abuse scandal in Iraq and how that might hurt this again collective effort in fighting terror.

MR. COTLER: Thank you for the question. I think its important maybe to point out, and if I may do so on behalf of my colleagues, we adopted today a significant and comprehensive blueprint or plan of action in four distinct areas.

The first is the one that you mention in terms of initiatives with respect to counterterrorism law and policy.

The second has to do with the integrity of border and transportation security.

The third is the combating of cyber crime, particularly in matters of hate crimes, cyber terrorism and cyber pornography.

And finally, as Attorney General Ashcroft mentioned, combating corruption. I mention this because as I mentioned to my Russian colleague just before we came in that it might have taken, you know, a much longer time, years maybe, for some of our parliaments to adopt these measures.

And his answer was very important here, and that is that it was because of our ongoing bilateral cooperation and multilateral approach that we were able to do this. And this can resonate as a blueprint for action for countries beyond the G8, and indeed, with regard to parliaments the world over.

And all this is underpinned by three principles, and this relates specifically now to your question. The first is the relationship between security and rights in the struggle against terrorism.

The position that we took and was one shared by all is that there is no contradiction between a commitment to security and a commitment to human rights. This is not an either/or proposition.

If we understand terrorism to be an assault on the security of democracy and an assault on the fundamental rights on its inhabitants, we must see counterterrorism law and policy as being the protection of the security of democracy; indeed, the protection of human security in that regard, and the protection of the most fundamental rights of each of its inhabits; namely, the right to life, liberty and security of the person.

Clearly, whatever is undertaken with respect to antiterrorism law and policy in the course of the enforcement and application must conform with international and domestic human rights safeguards. But we take the notion, therefore, the protection of human security and human rights, as underpinning this entire antiterrorism law and policy.

The second principle, and it has been mentioned, is that no country alone can combat this global threat of terrorism. Indeed, the way to look at this, and I think we have mistakenly looked at this up to now as being sometimes a kind of domestic criminal law due process model. But what we're dealing with is a transnational threat that in fact is assaultive of the peace and security of humankind as a whole.

In other words, we're not dealing with ordinary crime. We're dealing with crimes against humanity. We're not dealing with ordinary criminals. We're dealing with what is called in law *hostis humanus generis*, the enemies of humankind. And in that sense, it will take a global response, particularly with justice ministers in the moral and intellectual and policy leadership to combat this transnational global threat.

And the final point here, and it has not perhaps been stressed sufficiently, and that is the interrelationship between hate and terrorism. One of the enduring lessons of Nazism and more recently of the genocide of Rwanda, and we just commemorated the tenth anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda, is that this genocide, these killing fields, occurred not simply because of the machinery of death, but because of a culture of hate. It was this teaching of contempt, this demonizing of the other; this is where it all begins.

And in answer again specifically to the Supreme Court of Canada put it in very telling words: That the Holocaust did not begin in the gas chambers; it began with words. These, as the Court put it, are the catastrophic effects of racism. These are the chilling facts of history.

So our approach is to have a zero tolerance policy with respect to hate in order that we can accomplish a zero tolerance policy with regard to terrorism.

On the particularity of what is now happening in Iraq and how this impacts on all of this, I think the Attorney General spoke for his country and I think for all of us here when he expressed the manner in which the United States and its leaders feels appalled by what has happened. And the test of course will be the manner in which a democracy like the United States will be able with respect to protection of the rule of law, and with regard to public accountability, with regard to mobilizing its own human rights response, be able to provide, as Attorney General Ashcroft put it, a proper corrective to that which they have themselves acknowledged as being something for which they are appalled.

Thank you.

QUESTION: A question for the Russian Minister of Interior, and first who is the new person of your ministerial meeting. Mr. Nurgaliev. What do you think about problem of Chechnya? You know that there are money which coming from abroad to Chechen rebels, and it's a big question there is money rising from many organizations which are in the countries of -- what could you say about this problem? And have you any talks how to stop this money rising, which are coming from abroad which gives support to Chechen rebels?

MR. NURGALIEV: Thank you for your question. That's true. We have had discussions today of this subject within the framework of discussing international terrorism.

We touched on the problem of financing, the channels of financing. It is important to take note of the activities of organizations which launder money and do it not only in Russia but other countries of the world. For organizations of this sort, we have also held bilateral talks which

would -- in which we discuss the ways of stopping the flow of money channels. We have worked with our partners in creating means among countries where there are illegal organizations on both sides and try to stop their work.

We believe that this is a very important activity, and we've discussed not only international terrorism but found that the issue of corruption, when that came up, we once again discussed this issue, because financial support for terrorists is not only problem number one in Russia but throughout the world, and for that, we must undertake mutual steps in order to prevent money moving into the hands of the illegal organizations, which only bring death and blood on the hands of all of humanity.

MR. ASHCROFT: Thank you very much. Thank you.

###