

**ATTORNEY GENERAL PREPARED REMARKS ON THE NATIONAL
SECURITY
ENTRY-EXIT REGISTRATION SYSTEM**

June 6, 2002

(Attorney General Often Deviates from the Prepared Remarks)

I want to thank Commissioner Jim Ziglar for his assistance and for being with me today.

On September 11, the American definition of national security was changed forever. A band of men entered our country under false pretenses in order to plan and execute a murderous act of war. Some entered the country several years in advance; others entered several months in advance. Once inside the United States, they were easily able to avoid contact with immigration authorities and violate the terms of their visas with impunity.

In this new war, our enemy's platoons infiltrate our borders, quietly blending in with visiting tourists, students, and workers. They move unnoticed through our cities, neighborhoods, and public spaces. They wear no uniforms. Their camouflage is not forest green, but rather it is the color of common street clothing. Their tactics rely on evading recognition at the border and escaping detection within the United States. Their terrorist mission is to defeat America, destroy our values and kill innocent people.

The vulnerabilities of our immigration system became starkly clear on September 11. About a quarter century ago, the United States stopped asking international visitors to register periodically with immigration authorities, and stopped keeping track of our visitors' activities and whereabouts. This is in contrast to the practice of European nations, most of which have rigorous registration systems. Consequently, we have been unable to determine if foreign visitors follow their stated plans while guests in our country or even if they overstay the legal limit of their visas.

Accordingly, today I am announcing the NATIONAL SECURITY ENTRY-EXIT REGISTRATION SYSTEM. This system will expand substantially America's scrutiny of those foreign visitors who may pose a national security concern and enter our country. And it will provide a vital line of defense in the war against terrorism.

The responsibility to establish the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System is already contained in U.S. law. Some of the provisions date to the 1950s; others were added by Congress in the 1990s. Congress has mandated that, by 2005, the Department of Justice build an entry-exit system that tracks virtually all of the 35 million foreign visitors who come to the United States annually. This entry-exit registration system is the crucial first phase in that endeavor and will

track approximately 100,000 visitors in the first year.

There are three components to this initiative: first—fingerprinting and photographing at the border; second—periodic registration of aliens who stay in the United States thirty days or more; and third—exit controls that will help the Immigration and Naturalization Service to remove those aliens who overstay their visas.

We will evaluate individual visitors for the risk of involvement in terrorist activity and impose these requirements on visitors who fall into categories of elevated national security concern. The Immigration and Naturalization Service and the State Department will work together to identify these individuals at or prior to entry. The criteria that are used to identify such visitors will be continually updated to reflect our evolving intelligence on terrorist threats.

The first component of the system is fingerprinting and photographing at the border. It is critically important that we stop known or suspected terrorists from entering the country. Fingerprints are essential to that enterprise. Terrorists and wanted criminals often attempt to enter the country using assumed names and false passports. But fingerprints do not lie.

With new technologies, we are able to perform a quick fingerprint check at the border that takes only three minutes to complete. We have already deployed systems at a limited number of ports of entry that can scan a person's fingerprints and compare the prints to vast databases of known criminals and terrorists. The early results of this pilot program are extremely promising: we are receiving an average of 67 "hits" per week, and 1400 wanted criminals have been arrested in the past five months as they have attempted to enter the country.

Under the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System, we will run the fingerprints of entering aliens against a database of thousands of known terrorists. The operations of the U.S. military in Afghanistan have allowed us to expand that database considerably.

By running the fingerprints of entering aliens against these prints, we will be able to stop terrorists from entering the country. In addition, we will run the fingerprints of incoming visitors against a database of wanted criminals. And finally, we will be able to stop terrorists from entering the United States a second time under a different name using forged documents.

We have the technological capacity to do this, and now we have a sizable database of fingerprints of known terrorists. We need to deploy this technology as soon as possible to protect American lives.

The second component of the system is periodic registration. This will only apply to those

individuals of elevated national security concern who stay in the country for more than thirty days. They will have to register at an INS office and simply verify that they are doing what they said they came to America to do and living where they said they would live. Such registration will be required at the 30-day point, and every 12 months after the date of entry. Aliens already in the United States who fall into categories of elevated national security concern will be asked to come in and register as well.

Our European allies have been using such registration systems for decades. For example, long-term visitors to France must register within 7 days of arrival, every 12 months thereafter, and whenever they change their address. This is a well-established way of making sure that visitors do not try to disappear into society, and that they stick to their stated plans while in the country.

The third component of the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System is establishing a system of exit controls, so that we know who leaves on time and who does not. This is a critical part of the system. Which brings me to a critical aspect of the system: arresting those individuals who attempt to evade the registration requirements or who attempt to stay in the country beyond their permitted time.

When aliens violate these rules, we will place their photographs, fingerprints, and information in the National Crime Information Center (or NCIC) system. The nation's 650,000 police officers check this system regularly in the course of traffic stops and routine encounters.

When federal, state and local law enforcement officers encounter an alien of national security concern who has been listed on the NCIC for violating immigration law, federal law permits them to arrest that individual and transfer him to the custody of the INS.

The Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel has concluded that this narrow, limited mission that we are asking state and local police to undertake voluntarily -- arresting aliens who have violated criminal provisions of Immigration and Nationality Act or civil provisions that render an alien deportable, and who are listed on the NCIC — is within the inherent authority of the states. The Department of Justice has no plans to seek additional support from state and local law enforcement in enforcing our nation's immigration laws, beyond our narrow anti-terrorism mission.

We are an open country that welcomes the people of the world to visit our blessed land. We will continue to greet our international neighbors with good will. Asking some visitors to verify their activities while they are here is fully consistent with that outlook. To meet our responsibility to protect American lives in the future, we take the steps that I have outlined today.

Thank you.