

**Remarks of Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr.**  
**Balkans Justice Ministerial**  
**Brdo pri Kranju, Slovenia**  
**Friday, April 15, 2011**

Thank you. Let me also thank the Government of Slovenia – and the people of Ljubljana – for hosting this important summit. It is an honor to join with so many critical leaders – and dedicated partners – in the global fight against corruption. And I am proud to bring greetings from President Obama and the American people.

I am also grateful for the opportunity to salute, and to help strengthen, the groundbreaking work taking place in the Balkans – and across Europe – to prevent and combat corruption.

Here in Slovenia, in particular, your steadfast – and growing – commitment to good governance is clear. Since gaining independence just two decades ago, this nation has made remarkable strides in promoting government effectiveness and accountability – and, in recent years, has even been recognized by both Transparency International and the World Bank as a leader in combating corruption.

This recognition has brought increased global influence and new responsibilities. From 2004, when Slovenia joined NATO and the EU – to Slovenia’s leadership while holding the EU Council Presidency in 2008 – right here at the Congress Centre – the international community has taken note of your willingness to play a prominent role on the world stage. Today, nations across Europe – and far beyond – are benefitting from your example, and your commitment to collaboration.

As we gather this week, this commitment has never been more important – especially in our collective efforts to prevent and combat corruption on a global scale.

This is urgent work. And, for me, it is deeply personal.

More than thirty years ago, I began my legal career in the Justice Department that I am now privileged to lead. As a young attorney, I was tasked with prosecuting public officials and those who bribed them. So, I understand the challenges of fighting corruption. But I also recognize the vital importance of this fight.

Corruption strikes hardest at the most vulnerable among us, siphoning scarce resources away from those most in need. It advances the selfish desires of a dishonest few over the best interests of those who work hard and obey the law. In countries rich and poor, large and small – corruption erodes trust in government and private institutions alike. It undermines confidence in the fairness of free and open markets. It stifles competition and repels foreign investment. It hinders progress, and it breeds contempt for the rule of law.

And yet corruption continues to flourish.

Despite all that's been accomplished in recent years – the development of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption; the establishment of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative; the launch of the Asset Recovery Mentor Program and the World Bank's Stolen Assets Recovery Program; the creation of the Financial Action Task Force; and the worldwide placement of U.S. legal advisors and law enforcement trainers – all nations struggle against corruption. Let me repeat that: all nations struggle against corruption. The United States is no exception.

In recent years, the U.S. Department of Justice has convicted hundreds of elected and appointed officials, military officers, and judges who abused their positions – as well as private citizens who illegally sought unfair advantages by bribing public servants. In fact, the Department's Criminal Division has a dedicated group of prosecutors – in its Public Integrity

Section, where I started my career – whose sole task is to prosecute corruption cases involving federal, state, and local officials across the United States. And all of our 94 United States Attorneys' Offices serve as vital partners in this work.

While I believe that – as law enforcement professionals – we have no more solemn duty than protecting the integrity of our government institutions and the rights of those we serve, I also recognize that this is no easy task. In many countries, beating back corruption requires a fundamental shift in the way business leaders and public officials conduct themselves. But – as history proves – such fundamental shifts can happen. And I am convinced that, in all of the nations represented here, extraordinary progress is possible – but only if we work together.

I'm pleased that, already, we are collaborating in a number of critical ways. We all can be encouraged by – and proud of – our current joint efforts to combat corruption and organized crime. Earlier this week, I had the chance to visit the Budapest International Law Enforcement Academy, where law enforcement experts from your countries are training with experts from the FBI and other U.S. law enforcement agencies. As I said to them: the relationships that they are building are critical in fostering strong international law enforcement cooperation – and they will be essential to our future success.

In addition to supporting your law enforcement communities, the Justice Department – and our partners in the U.S. Department of State – will continue working with your government and judicial leaders – and, specifically, your prosecutors and investigators – to build the capacity necessary to uphold the rule of law and to ensure the strength and integrity of your justice systems. For many years now, our International Criminal Investigations Training Assistance Program – and our Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training –

have placed legal and law enforcement experts and advisors in many of the countries you serve. The results have been remarkable. And this work will continue.

I also want to mention that the Justice Department is fully committed to supporting the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative Center in Bucharest – by stationing one of our prosecutors there, and by helping to advance operations aimed at taking down organized criminal groups across this region.

Through these and other efforts, I believe that we can – and will – rise to today’s challenges. And on behalf of President Obama and my colleagues across America’s government, I want to pledge to each of you – and the citizens you serve – that the United States will continue to stand with you in your own battles against corruption.

To win these battles, first and foremost, we must strengthen current efforts to call upon all nations to ratify – and to fully implement – the UN Convention Against Corruption. Nearly a decade after the Convention opened for signature, several of the world’s largest economies still have not ratified it. We can change this. And, together, we can encourage all parties to the Convention to put in place an effective, transparent, and inclusive review mechanism.

Second, we must ensure that corrupt officials do not retain illicit proceeds. When kleptocrats loot their nations’ treasuries, steal natural resources, and embezzle development aid – they condemn their nations’ children to starvation and disease. To me, asset recovery isn’t just a global necessity – it’s a moral imperative.

Through the aggressive enforcement of our asset forfeiture laws – especially, the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act – and by working in close cooperation with our international law enforcement partners, I’m proud that – in the last two years – the Justice Department has repatriated tens of millions in corruption proceeds. And last summer, we launched a Kleptocracy

Asset Recovery Initiative aimed at combating large-scale foreign official corruption and recovering public funds for their intended – and proper – use.

I am pleased to report that we are assembling a team of prosecutors to focus exclusively on this work. And although this new initiative already is yielding positive results, I know that its continued success will depend on our ability to engage a growing community of international partners. I am hopeful that you – and your counterparts across Europe – will take part in this effort.

Finally, we must insist that all nations end official impunity with regard to corruption. In a number of countries, immunity for actions of public officials, judges, and parliamentarians has been broadly adopted – often for the legitimate reason of affording officials protection from politically motivated prosecutions. In too many places, however, public officials are given blanket immunity from investigation and prosecution for any action – even where the conduct involves public corruption. In such places, immunity becomes impunity.

This cannot stand. And if we join together – and bring more nations into our work – it will not.

In this struggle, we must not falter or compromise. And, as we strengthen our fight against corruption, we must not give in to frustration or be deterred by the obstacles before us. Too many children’s lives, too many communities’ hopes, and too many futures now depend on the fulfillment of our shared commitment.

We must be united – not by our common problems, but by our collective resolve. And, together, we must step forward – toward progress, toward fairness, toward justice.

As we do, know that America is proud to walk at your side, privileged to count you as partners, and grateful to call you friends.

