

Attorney General Sessions discusses transnational criminal organizations in Boston

Here's audio and a text transcript from Attorney General Sessions discussing transnational criminal organizations to federal law enforcement in Boston on 21 September, 2017.

"Good afternoon.

It is great to be with you all here in Boston. Thank you, Bill for that kind introduction. I understand from my team that you all were the first U.S Attorney's Office to reach out and ask that I visit – and I am thrilled to be here and acknowledge the great work being done in this office.

And especially today, during what President Trump has declared both "Prescription Opioid and Heroin Epidemic Awareness Week" and "National Gang Violence Prevention Week," thank you for all of the work that you do to protect our families and communities from the devastation of drug abuse and the blight of gang violence.

President Trump's first declaration makes clear to all those who are suffering addiction, seeking treatment, or who are in recovery from opioid addiction: we stand with them, we are praying for them, and we are working every single day to help them.

And the second puts all gang members and other organized thugs on notice: we are coming for you. We will hunt you down; we will find you, and we will bring you to justice.

As violent crime is on the rise nationally and surging in some

of our major cities as we see more and more loved ones die at the hands of opioids and all the while remaining ever vigilant regarding the threat of radicalized terrorists, we face formidable challenges.

Yet, this office has risen to the occasion and zeroed in on yet another danger: transnational criminal organizations, specifically MS-13.

As this community knows first-hand, MS-13 is probably the most violent and ruthless gangs on the streets today. It has made inflicting gruesome violence their primary feature.

Guided by their motto – “Kill, Rape, and Control” – MS-13 has assaulted, raped, maimed, and killed just for the sake of it. In so doing, they have destroyed communities, the lives of hard-working law abiding immigrants, and left devastation and misery in their wake.

Over the past few months, I have been to ground zero for MS-13. First, I traveled to Central Islip, New York, where the gang is running rampant: killing victims, traumatizing communities, and replenishing its ranks by taking advantage of the Unaccompanied Alien Child program. This program continues to place juveniles from Central America into this gang controlled territory. It is clearly being abused.

Further, I have traveled to the proverbial “belly of the beast” in San Salvador, El Salvador, and observed the gang’s nerve center.

These experiences have only cemented my belief that MS-13 represents some of the worst of the worst when it comes to criminal street gangs.

Further, it has hardened my resolve that we must contain and dismantle this gang, clique by clique and member by member.

One need look no further than what has occurred here in Boston

as proof positive of what this gang is capable of.

The alleged gang murder of a mother in front of her two young children? It simply does not get any worse than this. The brave men and women of this office, along with your law enforcement counterparts, are taking the fight to them.

I understand that over 400 federal, state, and local law enforcement officers took part in the massive MS-13 takedown stemming from this office's indictment of 60 MS-13 members.

It is precisely this type of law enforcement collaboration that is absolutely necessary: street level intelligence and investigation combined with federal partnership remains a tried and true combination for successfully investigating and prosecuting this group of thugs.

You have also made good use of all the implements in the federal tool box: RICO, false documents, alien in possession of a firearm, and conspiracy to distribute narcotics. Once again, well done.

This is precisely how we will dismantle and defeat MS-13: charge them with whatever crime they commit and stay nimble and flexible to ensure we get them off of the street, in jail and out of the country.

As evidenced by the President's Executive Order, fighting transnational criminal organizations has been and continues to be one of the Administration's top priorities. As such, we at the Department have taken steps to support law enforcement and prosecutors in this mission:

We have issued mandates to the field that prosecutors renew their focus on immigration offenses-specifically where those criminals have a gang nexus, targeting violent crime offenses, and charging the most serious, readily provable offense – all of which will ensnare criminal gangs.

I have re-constituted the Organized Crime Council and charged our federal law enforcement partners to make the decimation and dismantlement of MS-13 a top priority, and this focus is already paying dividends.

We have sent additional prosecutorial resources to the Southwest Border and created Border Security Coordinators in each of our U.S. Attorney's Offices-to focus on criminals, like MS-13 that have a nexus to the Southern Border.

We have also re-invigorated the Institutional Hearing Program, or "IHP" whereby immigration judges come to Federal BOP facilities to adjudicate the immigration status of criminal aliens. It saves time, not to mention tax payer funds, and prevents some of these violent criminals from just being sent from federal prison to an ICE detention facility where they will then just wait, at taxpayer expense, for an immigration hearing that could have been done at their federal prison.

Finally, we have shifted things around in order to surge an additional 300 AUSAs to the field to specifically focus on violent crime and immigration, both of which will involve anti-MS-13 efforts.

But we are not done. These are great steps, but I am pleased to announce we are taking further action.

We are now working with the Department of Homeland Security and HHS to examine the unaccompanied minors issue and the exploitation of that program by gang members who come to this country as wolves in sheep clothing. In fact the gang uses this program as a means by which to recruit new members.

Further, we are engaged in increased and renewed international coordination between U.S. law enforcement and our partners in the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, improved sharing of cross border information is essential – this has already resulted in more gang apprehensions; In fact, El Salvador arrested 700 gang members

when we were there.

Let me be clear about something: the status quo is unacceptable. This is America. We will not allow the likes of MS-13 or any other gang to prey upon our communities, to decapitate individuals with machetes, baseball bats, and chains, – or to turn places like Boston, Washington, D.C., and Long Island, New York, into war zones. MS-13 members are known for attacking anyone perceived as even a possible rival.

All law abiding individuals must be free to walk down any street without fear of being hacked with a machete just because they don't don the white and blue of the Mara.

As I have said before, these gang members might be targeting our youth, but I have a message for them. We will find you. We will devastate your networks. We will starve your revenue sources, deplete your ranks, and seize your illicit profits.

We will not concede a single block or street corner to your vicious tactics.

From past investigations, we know these transnational criminal organizations smuggle members into our country almost exclusively through our border with Mexico. They station these gang members in safe houses in Texas before they travel to various points around the United States.

Securing our border, both through a physical wall and with the brave men and women of the border patrol and restoring an orderly and lawful system of immigration is part and parcel of this anti-gang strategy.

Again, I want to applaud federal, state, and local law enforcement and our prosecutors here in the Boston area for all you have done and being the tip of the spear in our fight against MS-13.

As I stated we are currently battling many public safety

issues.

On Monday, the FBI will release the annual crime statistics for 2016. Tragically, they will show violent crime rose by again. Murder rose. Aggravated assault, rape, and robbery rose. We cannot accept this as the new normal. I have said before, my best judgement was that the 2015 numbers were not a blip.

This is a frightening trend that threatens to erode so much progress that had made our neighborhoods and communities safer – over 30 years declines in crime are being replaced by increases. I urge mayors and governors to take this seriously now. And to work with federal, state, and local law enforcement. We must confront this rise before it gains more momentum.

Further, as this community felt on Marathon Monday, 2013, at the finish line of a historic and proud race, terrorism remains an omnipresent concern. Once again, law enforcement and prosecutors, including your Acting U.S. Attorney, rose to the occasion and stayed faithful to our mission by bringing those responsible to justice.

Well done, and thank you.

As we have seen most recently with our brethren in the UK, whether it is a bomb on mass transit, a vehicle used as a deadly weapon, or a hijacked airliner, we must always be ready and use every lawful tool in our arsenal to disrupt a plot before it comes to fruition.

Further, this area – along with the rest of New England – is in the midst of an opioid epidemic. These toxic substances are stealing our brothers, sisters, cousins, and moms and dads.

I have traveled to New Hampshire and seen 50 mothers of opioid victims lined up holding placards for their dead children – before a high school audience.

That left an indelible impression on me, and I will never forget the pain that still showed in their eyes.

Again, the Administration has taken this fight head on. We are prescribing too many painkillers – they are turning out to be killers themselves.

We are sending additional resources into the field to prosecute dirty doctors, dealers, and anyone in the illicit supply chain.

We will not rest – I will not rest – until we turn the tide on opioids.

Prescription abuse can and will be dramatically reduced. This Department of Justice is committed to that goal. I urge you to emphasize this problem.

Thank you for all that you are doing in fighting this many-headed hydra of crime. Using the force multiplier of federal, state, and local collaboration, we can, and will, protect our communities and uphold the rule of law.

Going back to our country's founding, Bostonians have always been known as tough and indomitable people, unwilling to accept affronts to their freedom. I know that determination will serve you—and all of us—well in our current battles against our foes.

Keep up the good work. Thank you and God bless you.”

Photos and video by Josh Souza.