AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

Statement on the Release of Department of Justice Office of Legal Counsel Memos Concerning Interrogation Techniques

April 16, 2009

The Department of Justice will today release certain memos issued by the Office of Legal Counsel between 2002 and 2005 as part of an ongoing court case. These memos speak to techniques that were used in the interrogation of terrorism suspects during that period, and their release is required by the rule of law.

My judgment on the content of these memos is a matter of record. In one of my very first acts as President, I prohibited the use of these interrogation techniques by the United States because they undermine our moral authority and do not make us safer. Enlisting our values in the protection of our people makes us stronger and more secure. A democracy as resilient as ours must reject the false choice between our security and our ideals, and that is why these methods of interrogation are already a thing of the past.

But that is not what compelled the release of these legal documents today. While I believe strongly in transparency and accountability, I also believe that in a dangerous world, the United States must sometimes carry out intelligence operations and protect information that is classified for purposes of national security. I have already fought for that principle in court and will do so again in the future. However, after consulting with the Attorney General, the Director of National Intelligence, and others, I believe that exceptional circumstances surround these memos and require their release.

First, the interrogation techniques described in these memos have already been widely reported. Second, the previous administration publicly acknowledged portions of the program and some of the practices associated with these memos. Third, I have already ended the techniques described in the memos through an Executive order. Therefore, withholding these memos would only serve to deny facts that have been in the public domain for some time. This could contribute to an inaccurate accounting of the past and fuel erroneous and inflammatory assumptions about actions taken by the United States.

In releasing these memos, it is our intention to assure those who carried out their duties relying in good faith upon legal advice from the Department of Justice that they will not be subject to prosecution. The men and women of our intelligence community serve courageously on the frontlines of a dangerous world. Their accomplishments are unsung and their names unknown, but because of their sacrifices, every single American is safer. We must protect their identities as vigilantly as they protect our security, and we must provide them with the confidence that they can do their jobs.

Going forward, it is my strong belief that the United States has a solemn duty to vigorously maintain the classified nature of certain activities and information related to national security. This is an extraordinarily important responsibility of the Presidency, and it is one that I will carry out assertively, irrespective of any political concern. Consequently, the exceptional circumstances surrounding these memos should not be viewed as an erosion of the strong legal basis for maintaining the classified nature of secret activities. I will always do whatever is necessary to protect the national security of the United States.

This is a time for reflection, not retribution. I respect the strong views and emotions that these issues evoke. We have been through a dark and painful chapter in our history. But at a time of great challenges and disturbing disunity, nothing will be gained by spending our time and energy laying blame for the past. Our national greatness is embedded in America's ability to right its course in concert with our core values and to move forward with confidence. That is why we must resist the forces that divide us and, instead, come together on behalf of our common future.

The United States is a nation of laws. My administration will always act in accordance with those laws and with an unshakeable commitment to our ideals. That is why we have released these memos, and that is why we have

taken steps to ensure that the actions described within them never take place again.

NOTE: The statement referred to Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr.; and Director of National Intelligence Dennis C. Blair.

Remarks at a State Dinner Hosted by President Felipe de Jesus Calderon Hinojosa of Mexico in Mexico City
April 16, 2009

Good evening. Thank you very much. Let me begin by expressing my deepest thanks to President Calderon and Mrs. Zavala for their gracious welcome, and thank you for the spectacular setting. I can't imagine a more magnificent evening. This is my first trip as President to Mexico, and it's one that I will always remember fondly for the hospitality and the warmth that has been provided to me during my brief visit.

Now, earlier today we conducted a series of productive meetings on a whole host of challenges and opportunities that we face jointly. We spoke about our deep economic ties, reflecting the $1 billion of trade that crosses our borders every day. And we discussed steps that we can take together, both bilaterally and in a global setting, to advance opportunity and prosperity in our two countries and across the Americas.

We spoke about the deep ties between our peoples, and what steps can be made to meet our immigration challenge. That involves passing comprehensive immigration reform in the United States, which I am committed to doing, and it involves making certain that we are promoting increased opportunity here in Mexico.

We spoke about our obligation to take steps to build clean energy together that can power our economies and beat back climate change in future centuries. And of course, we spoke about the grave dangers that the drug cartels are presenting to both our nations, that are threatening innocent men and women and children on both sides of our borders, and our shared determination to put an end to these drug wars.

These are some of the critical challenges that we face as a result of a border we share. But what makes us good neighbors is not that our interests are always aligned, that we will agree on everything. In our long and interwoven history, we haven't always been on the same side of every issue, and there is no doubt that in the future there will be differences once again. What makes us good neighbors is a simple truth that our people share so much more than common challenges and common interests. We also share values and ideals. We are both a people who know the meaning of hard work, a people who know what it means to struggle and to sacrifice on behalf of our children and our grandchildren, people who know that strength comes from faith and from family, people who have known hardship and trial and persevered in the face of great odds.

That's the story of the separate struggles for independence that have made our nations who we are, struggles that are forged on this continent, two adjoining nations founded on a set of shared values that our democracy is not simply a gift from a previous generation, but a responsibility for each generation to protect and to pass on to the next. We both understand that no one, whether through influence of politics, the power of money, or the fear of force, is above the law, and that we are—every one of us—equal, endowed with the basic human rights that spring not from our laws but from our Maker.

Each of our nations was formed out of this sense that a state has no greater responsibility than to uphold the essential dignity of its citizens. That was the promise of my country's struggle for independence. That was the promise of Mexico's struggle for independence. That was the promise of American independence. It's a promise advanced by Hidalgo as well as Washington, by Lincoln but also by Juarez, and a promise that now falls on all of us to advance in our own time.