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REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AT SIGNING OF ANTITERRORISM BILL
The South Lawn
April 24, 1996

Thank you very much, Mary Jo White, for the work you do every day. Thank you, Attorney General Reno. Thank you, Mr. Vice President.

To Senator Dole and Chairman Hatch and Chairman Hyde, the other members of Congress who are here; Governor Keating and the Attorneys General who are here and the others in law enforcement; to the members of the administration, and especially to the victims' families who are here.

I thank the families for coming today. I thank their advocates for coming. But I think we should all acknowledge that the importance of this event is embodied in no small measure by the fact that the families were willing to come here, knowing that it would in some measure force them to relive the pain that they have endured because of acts of terror. It took a lot of courage for them to endure that pain. So while this is a good day for America, we can't really say it is a happy day. Not all good days can be happy days, but every American is in debt to these families for standing up for the need for the changes that we have experienced. And I ask the rest of us to acknowledge that. And we thank you.

I also would point out that Presidents can advocate and the Executive Branch can enforce the laws, but this would not have happened but for the remarkable convergence of Republicans and Democrats in the Congress. The Vice President introduced those who were especially active in the leadership who are over here to my left who will come up in a moment when we sign the bill. But there are so many more members of Congress here, for the benefit of all of you, I would like to ask every member who is here and who worked so hard on this legislation to please stand and be recognized. Would the members of Congress please stand? Thank you very much.

This is a good day because our police officers are now going to be better prepared to stop terrorists, our prosecutors better prepared to punish them, our people being better protected from their designs. This legislation is more important today because of the very forces which have unlocked so much potential for progress -- the new technologies, the instant communications, the open borders. These things have done so much good. But they have also made it easier for the organized forces of hatred and division to endanger the lives of innocent people. We have seen terrorism take its horrible toll all around the world, from Tokyo to London to Jerusalem, and, of course, in our own country.

When a terrorist car bomb took the lives of 241 American Marines in Beirut, we felt the shock waves here at home. When savage killers took the life of Leon Klinghoffer, countless Americans wept for him and for his family. When Pan Am 103 went down over Lockerbie,

Scotland, killing 270 people including 189 Americans, we saw again that there are no borders or bounds on the forces of hatred. When the bomb exploded at the World Trade Center, as Mary Jo said, by the grace of God killing only six but injuring over 1000 people, we knew again that we had no place to hide. And, of course, five days ago we marked the first anniversary of the most terrible terrorist attack upon these shores in our history, reminding us that even the very young and the most innocent are not immune.

We also have to remember as we remember those who were lost that as painful as that loss is, their deaths and their destructions are not the terrorists' only goals, for each and every act of terrorism is also a means to another end. The unbelievable idea that it is all right to kill an innocent person to achieve a political goal, to stop us from living our lives in the light of liberty, to force us to cower in the dark grip of fear, to terrify us as targets into submission.

So let us honor those who lost their lives by resolving to hold fast against the forces of violence and division, by never allowing them to shake our resolve or break our spirit, to frighten us into sacrificing our sacred freedoms or surrendering a drop of precious American liberty. Rather we must guard against them, speak against them, and fight against them.

Fighting terrorism is and will for a long time to come be one of the top security priorities of the United States. On our own and with our allies, we have implemented strong sanctions against states that harbor terrorists and encourage them. We have intensified partnerships with other countries to stand together against terrorists around the world. We have increased our investment, our personnel, and our training for law enforcement efforts here at home.

I sent Congress antiterrorism legislation over a year ago, and after the Oklahoma City bombing I asked for additional measures. I applaud the great majority of Congress who stood up for the safety of the American people, worked through the policy debates, and made sure that in the end politics faltered and common sense prevailed. Democrats and Republicans, Republicans and Democrats, people who love their country as patriots came together, worked together, and got the job done.

The antiterrorism bill is grounded in common sense and steeled with force. Because of this bill, law enforcement will be better prepared than ever to stop terrorists before they strike and to bring them to justice when they do. From now on we can quickly expel foreigners who dare to come to America and support terrorist activities. From now on American prosecutors can wield new tools and expanded penalties against those who terrorize Americans at home or abroad. From now on we can stop terrorists from raising money in the United States to pay for their horrible crimes.

From now on criminals sentenced to death for their vicious crimes will no longer be able to use endless appeals to delay their sentences, and families of victims will no longer have to endure years of anguish and suffering.

We have new laws and better controls against chemical and biological weapons. We have agreed to put chemical markers in plastic explosives that will help us to detect explosives like those used to bring down Pan Am 103. We will be able to require chemical taggets in some other explosive materials as well. They will make it easier for police to trace bombs to the criminals who made them and bring those criminals to justice.

This legislation is a strong step forward for our security, but we mustn't stop there. I am directing the Secretary of the Treasury to complete the study of taggets required by Congress and propose appropriate regulations as quickly as possible. We must also address the problem of black and smokeless powders routinely used to make illegal smokeless devices like pipe bombs. I'm directing Secretary Rubin to consult with industry representatives and the law enforcement community to report back with appropriate recommendations.

Finally, I believe we have to take additional steps. I believe we must do more to help police keep terrorists who are suspected terrorists under surveillance. I believe we should give law enforcement more time to investigate and prosecute terrorists who use machine guns, sawed-off shotguns and explosive devices. I agree with police officers that instead of creating a commission to study them, in the end we must ban cop-killer bullets.

Nonetheless, make no mistake about it: This bill strikes a mighty blow against terrorism, and it is fitting that this bill becomes law during National Crime Victims Rights Week, because it stands up for victims in so many important ways. There are a lot of victims' advocates and victims here, and I thank them for their presence today. This bill recognizes that victims have a compelling interest in the trials of those accused of committing crimes against them and requires closed-circuit television coverage when federal trials are moved far away, a provision we owe to the vigilance of the members of Congress from Oklahoma. And we thank you for it.

I'd like to close with a word to all of the family members of Americans slain by terrorists, and to the survivors of terrorism, to the children who lost their parents in Pan Am 103 and parents who lost their children in Israel, to all of you from Oklahoma City, to Andrew Kerr on my staff of the National Security Council whose father was murdered in Beirut, to each and every one of you with us today and those who are watching all across this great land of ours. Your endurance and your courage is a lesson to us all. Your vigilance has sharpened our vigilance.

And so I sign my name to this bill in your names. We renew our fight against those who seek to terrorize us in your names. We send a loud, clear message today all over the world in your names. America will never surrender to terror. America will never tolerate terrorism. America will never abide terrorists. Wherever they come from, wherever they go, we will go after them. We will not rest until we have brought them all to justice, and secured a future for our people, safe from the harm they would do -- in your names.

Thank you. God bless you. And God bless America.