

Major Executive Speeches

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Good afternoon, it's great to be here with you. We in the FBI are glad to be working with so many different partners toward a common goal--from Chief Bratton and Sheriff Baca here in Los Angeles to our friends who have traveled here from other cities and nations. We deeply appreciate your commitment to combating gang violence, and we deeply appreciate your friendship.

All of you in this room already have a solid working knowledge of gangs. Unfortunately, this comes from fighting them in your own cities. And so today, I want to give you a quick overview of the national gang problem from the FBI's perspective, and talk about what we are doing together to combat it.

But first, I want to tell you a story.

Last September, a mother was working in an outdoor market near MacArthur Park here in Los Angeles. Her newborn son was beside her in his stroller.

Just steps away, members of a clique of the 18th Street Gang approached one of the market's street vendors. The gang claimed this man was selling his goods in what they insisted was "their" territory. Over a period of time, they had been demanding the vendor pay them "rent." The man consistently refused. And so that night, they simply opened fire on him.

Miraculously, he survived. But one of the bullets missed its mark, and struck and killed the baby in his stroller. His name was Luis Angel Garcia. He was only 23 days old.

This is just one of many heartbreaking stories. I'm sure you have all seen more than your fair share of them, which is why you are here today.

It's fitting that our conference takes place here. Los Angeles is ground zero for modern gang activity. Many gangs were born here, a generation ago. But they are no longer limited to Los Angeles. Like a cancer, gangs are spreading to communities across America.

Gang violence has become a part of the daily lives of teachers and taxi drivers, police officers and pastors, parents and children.

Just look at the bus stop shooting last Wednesday at the corner of Central and Vernon Avenues. A gunman opened fire with a semi-automatic. He apparently missed his intended victims, but shot and wounded eight others, including five children.

As Mayor Villaraigosa put it, "While no one died yesterday, the bullets unleashed shot through the core of the entire community."

We are seeing scenes like this play out around our countries. In too many neighborhoods, too many young people are recruited into gangs. They fall into a life of crime, drugs, and violence. They shoot each other, with no regard to the innocent bystanders caught in the crossfire. Crime and violence are not confined to their cliques, but have a chilling effect on

entire communities.

There are now over 30,000 gangs in communities throughout the United States, and over 800,000 gang members. To further complicate things, there is no "typical" gang--which means there is no one-size fits all approach to combating them.

Some are comprised of just three or four individuals whose sole ambition is to control drug sales on their corner. Others have hi-tech hierarchies and maintain their own websites. And for every highly organized gang enterprise, there are hundreds of local gangs wreaking havoc on street corners and in neighborhoods.

Take MS-13 as an example. MS-13 was born in Los Angeles--and still has a significant presence here--but has spread across 42 states and at least four foreign countries. It is now truly a transnational gang.

We are seeing a tremendous amount of MS-13 activity in cities such as Baltimore, Houston, New York, Washington, D.C., and even Omaha. But we are also seeing a rise in MS-13 activity in Atlanta, Denver, Indianapolis, and New Orleans.

Gang members are involved in a wide range of criminal activities, from drug distribution to theft to homicide. They sometimes form ad-hoc alliances with other gangs to facilitate their activities. They communicate with cliques in other states and other countries.

We estimate MS-13 already has as many as 10,000 members. But the gang is focused on recruiting even more members, and is targeting middle school and high school students. In our assessment, MS-13 is both organized and opportunistic. And gang members become more dangerous as they continue to grow in number and to migrate across state and international borders.

Look at the shooting last week in Charlotte, North Carolina. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg SWAT Team was serving a search warrant in a home when suddenly, shots rang out. The brother of the target allegedly fired upon the officers, who fired back. Both brothers are suspected members of MS-13.

Thankfully, no one was killed. But this case is a chilling reminder of the danger law enforcement officers face every day as they go about their jobs.

Modern gangs are more diverse, more dispersed, and more dangerous. All of this makes your jobs much more difficult.

Just look at Los Angeles as one example. The Los Angeles Police Department has over 9,600 officers. Over 330 of them are assigned to the Gang Enforcement Division--and that's not counting detectives or officers working narcotics. The Los Angeles Sheriff's Department has over 10,000 sworn deputies. Two hundred detectives work gang investigations, and 62 Gang Enforcement Deputies patrol the streets.

But just in the city of Los Angeles, there are roughly 40,000 subjects that meet the criteria for gang members, and over 400 gangs.

Los Angeles police and sheriff's deputies have a tremendous amount of experience when it comes to gangs. They are seasoned and they are dedicated. But statistically speaking, the ratio of gang members to police officers is overwhelming. And like all law enforcement, they are constrained by limitations of personnel, time, and resources.

That's where the FBI and our federal partners can help. We can combine our strengths with those of state and local law enforcement to tackle gangs as a team.

From a national perspective, the FBI focuses its efforts on the violent gangs that present the greatest multi-jurisdictional threat. Our traditional approach to combating gangs has been to go after them as enterprises--much like how we tackled organized crime.

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Gangs have connections to so many facets of society, from the military to the prison system. Their tentacles encompass a wide range of criminal activities, from alien smuggling to mortgage fraud, and from identity theft to extortion. And they are becoming increasingly savvy when it comes to technology--especially the Internet.

Our strategy has been to eliminate the leadership of gang enterprises. Our goal is not just to disrupt their activities, but dismantle them entirely.

Taking apart a gang is like demolishing a building. Hacking away at individual walls and beams might damage the building, but it doesn't destroy it. But using federal drug and racketeering statutes is akin to dynamiting the foundation. Once the gang's leadership infrastructure implodes, all members are weakened. It becomes difficult for the group to operate. Eventually, it crumbles.

And so our strategy is to prosecute as many gang leaders, members, and associates as possible so there are no pieces left which are large enough to allow the gang to rebuild. With this as our ultimate goal, the FBI brings three assets to the table: partnerships, intelligence, and federal law.

Gangs can easily cross jurisdictions; so must law enforcement. The most powerful response is a joint response.

Take the Justice Department's Project Safe Neighborhoods as an example. Its goal is to reduce violent crime by focusing on gun violence. The ATF's Violent Crime Impact Teams have taken the lead, bringing together federal, state, and local law enforcement and prosecutors to target the "worst of the worst" offenders and put them behind bars. There are 30 Violent Crime Impact Teams in hot-spots throughout the country, and they are an outstanding model of interagency coordination.

That is just the kind of coordination we need to confront gang violence. When your cities face a rash of homicides or armed robberies, you have to act quickly. Your immediate concern is making sure the gang members don't get away with murder--or think they have--and become emboldened to commit more crimes. You may not be able to devote the time or the resources to initiate a long-term investigation to disrupt that gang--but we can.

Our joint efforts provide a balance between an immediate response and a long-term solution. Together, we can cut off the criminals from the street level up. And we can use intelligence and information sharing to dismantle the group from the top down.

That's why the FBI has 141 Safe Streets Task Forces dedicated to violent gangs across the country--10 more than we had a year ago. We have over 630 Agents dedicated to gang investigations, and over 1,150 state and local Task Force Officers. Agents and police work in lock-step, sharing information and investigating cases as a team. And they are having a real impact.

This past November, the Safe Streets Task Force here in Los Angeles arrested 26 members and associates of MS-13, including the "shot caller" Oscar Chacon, and several top leaders.

Also in November, the Task Force in Phoenix conducted an operation that resulted in the arrests of more than 20 gang members and associates. Charges were brought not just against violent street gangs, but also against Bulgarian nationals with links to organized crime and drug trafficking.

In December, the Task Force in Houston arrested 22 members and associates of the Raza Unida Prison Gang and the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas. They were working together to transport methamphetamine from Mexico to Corpus Christi, and distribute it throughout Texas.

In addition to the Safe Streets Task Forces, in 2004, we formed the MS-13 National Gang Task Force. This Task Force can see connections that might only be visible from the 30,000-foot perspective, and can help direct and coordinate investigations. They have already produced significant results, from intelligence products to multi-national operations. Intelligence goes hand-in-hand with partnerships. One good piece of intelligence--whether it is a phone number, a name, or an ATM receipt--can be the breakthrough we need to make a vital connection or crack a case. Much of the gang intelligence the FBI collects comes from your officers on the street, who know their communities inside and out. In return, the FBI disseminates gang intelligence back to you. One way we do this is through the National Gang Intelligence Center, which serves as a collection and distribution point for gang information. Intelligence developed from our partnerships is provided to the NGIC for analysis and dissemination, and hopefully, prosecution.

We also disseminate gang intelligence through Law Enforcement Online, or LEO. In fact, the MS-13 National Gang Task Force has a Special Interest Group on LEO that allows members to securely share information, review global trends, download intelligence products, obtain training, and even have real-time secure discussions.

And the FBI's third weapon is federal statutes, such as RICO. Working together, we can bring gang cases to federal court, where sentences are longer. And federal asset forfeiture laws allow us to seize money, property, and other assets from convicted gang members.

Partnerships, intelligence, and federal law are all vital elements in our formula for combating gang violence. And this formula has produced success stories in cities plagued by gang violence, from Chicago to New York, and from San Antonio to San Diego. In 2007 alone, joint investigations led to over 2,300 convictions, 685 disruptions and 106 dismantlements of gangs. They also helped net over \$27 million in seizures and over \$11 million in forfeitures.

As I said, the FBI's traditional approach has been to identify gangs by working from the bottom up, and dismantle them by working from the top down. We've had some fantastic results. But given the scope of gang activity throughout America, it has become clear that this traditional approach is only part of the solution to a complex problem.

One reason is that gangs operate across state lines and international borders. So not only do we have to work closely together within American cities, we also have to work closely with our international partners. That's exactly the reason we originally established the MS-13 National Gang Task Force, and why we continue to make it a high priority. In fact, our relationships have grown so strong that we have taken our cooperation to the next level.

We established the Transnational Anti-Gang Initiative, known as "TAG," with our partners in El Salvador's Policía Nacional Civil. The goal of the TAG is to investigate, disrupt, and dismantle gangs whose activities rise to the level of criminal enterprise. This partnership allows the FBI and the PNC to share valuable intelligence when our investigations have a common nexus.

The TAG is off to a great start--relationships are evolving, friendships are forming, and our teamwork is already producing results. For example, we developed crucial leads for a gang-related homicide investigation in Miami thanks to our information sharing. And an individual arrested by U.S. authorities on immigration charges was identified as being wanted for multiple homicides in El Salvador.

The TAG's first joint operation was conducted in late September 2007 and resulted in the arrests of 10 violent MS-13 gang members, the seizure of firearms, and the recovery of a three-year-old child who had been missing since his mother's death in 2005.

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This is only the beginning of what we believe will be a long and productive partnership. The MS-13 National Gang Task Force and the PNC have also spearheaded the Central American Fingerprint Exploitation Initiative, known as CAFÉ. Through CAFÉ, criminal biometric data and fingerprints from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Belize, and Honduras are collected, stored, and incorporated into the FBI's database. We make them available to all U.S. law enforcement personnel.

CAFÉ also provides training and equipment to help participating countries to do their own digital fingerprint identification and analysis.

We are already seeing results. Since May 2006, the FBI has compared over 60,000 criminal fingerprints from Mexico, El Salvador, and Belize to U.S. databases. Of the 50,000 fingerprint records from El Salvador, about 4,300 records were positive matches in our databases.

I want to take a moment to thank the State Department for its generous funding of both TAG and CAFÉ, which fall under the State Department's Merida Initiative. The Merida Initiative is another sign of the United States' commitment to working with partners in Mexico and Central America to confront criminal organizations. And as TAG and CAFÉ show, it is already having a tremendous impact on our ability to work together across international boundaries.

But there is yet another joint initiative. The FBI has partnered with the Los Angeles City Mayor's Office, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, the Los Angeles Police Department and the PNC to develop an international officer exchange program. Officers of the PNC will be assigned to LAPD and LASD for 30 days at a time for training. Not only will we learn each other's best practices, we will be forming lifelong professional and personal relationships that will help us all accomplish our missions.

All of these efforts--from multi-agency Safe Streets Task Forces to the multi-national TAG--are bearing fruit. In an outstanding example of international cooperation, last month the Safe Streets Task Force in Washington, D.C. arrested one of El Salvador's 50 Most Wanted Fugitives.

As background, a detective with the Arlington Police Department provided the MS-13 National Gang Task Force with the subject's name and date of birth, and on a hunch, asked that we run his name against criminal files in El Salvador. Sure enough, the TAG team in El Salvador determined the subject was wanted in connection with a homicide.

The subject was arrested here in the United States. And when his fingerprints were run through IAFIS, they were a match for a CAFÉ record from San Salvador.

This case is a classic example of all our efforts coming together--state and local partnerships, the MS-13 National Gang Task Force, the TAG, the CAFÉ initiative, and the Safe Streets Task Forces. This is why it is so important that we keep building our partnerships, expanding our technology, and sharing our intelligence.

In spite of the success stories you write every day with your work, sometimes it seems that you never have enough resources to keep up with the challenges you face. But as Winston Churchill once said: "The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity. The optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty."

In our line of work, we are certainly beset with many difficulties. We are all facing financial shortfalls and limited resources, yet criminals seem to be thriving. And watching the numbers of gang members and violent gang-related incidents rise is dispiriting.

The reality is that we can't keep up with those raw numbers. But we have to find the opportunities amid the difficulties--so here's what we can do: We can keep strengthening our partnerships. We can keep improving our intelligence gathering, analysis, and sharing.

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We can continue to work as a united front to undertake complex investigations that might once have been limited to a single department in a single city.

The more complex these investigations are, the more we need each other. And what we can't forget is that our communities need us, too.

The 13-year old kids getting recruited into gangs need us to stand up and fight for them. The neighborhoods ravaged by robberies, drug sales, and shootings need us to stand up and fight for them. The families torn apart by murder call out to us--they are not collateral damage, they are victims, and they need us to stand up and fight for them.

To come full circle, let me share one more success story with you, to bear in mind when you grow discouraged or overwhelmed by the enormity of the task before us.

This past October, the Safe Streets Task Force in Los Angeles conducted a major takedown of a clique of the 18th Street Gang. Eighteen gang members and associates were indicted on federal narcotics charges. This investigation dovetailed with the LAPD's investigation of the shooting near MacArthur Park, which killed Baby Luis Garcia.

In the wake of that tragedy, the FBI offered its assistance to the LAPD's Robbery-Homicide Division. We passed on the intelligence we had gathered from our takedown, and we worked as one team on the investigation. As a result, six subjects have been arrested and charged by the District Attorney for their roles in the shooting--including the actual shooter. And we will not rest until we track down every single person involved.

Nothing can bring Baby Luis back to his mother. But our job is to stand up and fight for him. Our mission is to bring some measure of justice to his family. And we are confident that all of the killers and their co-conspirators will be brought to justice.

Fighting crime is deeply rooted in the FBI's heritage. Since its inception 100 years ago, the FBI has always stood shoulder-to-shoulder with police and sheriffs to combat threats to our collective safety. And we always will.

In our post-September 11 world, our responsibilities are greater than ever. But so is our resolve. No matter what agency, what state, what country we come from, we are all here because we believe in our mission, and we are all committed to working together to protect our communities.

I want to close with the words of a great American president, John F. Kennedy. These words were spoken 47 years ago to our friends in Canada, but they apply perfectly today to our partners and friends in Mexico and Central America.

President Kennedy said, "Geography has made us neighbors. History has made us friends. Economics has made us partners, and necessity has made us allies. Those whom God has so joined together, let no man put asunder."

No matter how formidable the challenges we face--no matter how forcefully gang violence threatens to tear our communities and our coalitions asunder--we must maintain our commitment to being neighbors, friends, partners, and allies. Standing together, we are more formidable than any adversary. And standing together, we will prevail.

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