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The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

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Remarks by Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Lisa

O. Monaco

As Prepared for Delivery

“Countering Violent Extremism and the Power of Community”

Harvard Kennedy School Forum

Tuesday, April 15, 2014

Thank you so much, Farah [Pandith], for your kind introduction, and for your service to our country as the first Special Representative to Muslim communities during your time at the State Department, and as a leading advocate for a community of voices to counter extremism.

I want to thank everyone at the Harvard Kennedy School for doing so much to develop our future public servants and political leaders, and I’m honored to be with you today. It’s an honor to be part of the great Forum tradition. I’d like to thank my colleague Deputy Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, as well as Jeffery Brown from the Ten Point Coalition and Haris Tarin from the Muslim Public Affairs Council for joining me for what I am sure will be an excellent discussion.

Of course, we’re here today because of a tragedy. This morning I joined Vice President Biden at the memorial service marking the anniversary of the Boston Marathon bombings - marking one year since we were shocked by those awful images at the finish line; one year since we lost Krystle Campbell, Lingzi Lu, eight-year-old Martin Richard and Officer Sean Collier - all innocent lives and all lost far too soon. It’s been one year since we saw how Boston responds in the face of terrorism—with resilience and resolve and unbending strength.

When the bombs went off, I had been President Obama’s chief advisor on homeland security and counterterrorism for just a few weeks. It was a deeply personal introduction to the demands of this job. I was raised a few miles from here—in Newton. I went to high school in the shadow of Fenway Park and then made the long trek down Storrow Drive to come here for college. Growing up, I spent every Patriot’s Day lining that marathon route - usually at the crest of Heartbreak Hill - cheering on the runners and taking part in a great Boston tradition. And last year, my twin brother was there in the crowd, alongside thousands of other Bostonians. It was not only an attack on the homeland; it was an attack on my hometown.

We’ve faced violent expressions of extremism throughout our history, including 19 years ago this week in Oklahoma City. And, sadly, we continue to face it, as we saw just two days ago in Overland Park, Kansas, when a gunman—allegedly a white supremacist with a long history of racist and anti-Semitic behavior—opened fire at a Jewish community center and retirement home, killing three. And, while the American people continue to stand united against hatred and violence, the

unfortunate truth is that extremist groups will continue targeting vulnerable populations in an effort to promote their murderous ideology.

That's why stemming domestic radicalization to violence has been a key element of our counterterrorism strategy from day one. President Obama has been laser-focused on making sure we use all the elements of our national power to protect Americans, including developing the first government-wide strategy to prevent violent extremism in the United States. At the same time, we recognize that there are limits to what the federal government can do. So we must rely on the partnership of those who are most familiar with the local risks, those who are in the best position to take action—local communities.

Local communities are the most powerful asset we have in the struggle against violence and violent extremism. We've crunched the data on this. In the more than 80 percent of cases involving homegrown violent extremists, people in the community—whether peers or family members or authority figures or even strangers—had observed warning signs a person was becoming radicalized to violence. But more than half of those community members downplayed or dismissed their observations without intervening. So it's not that the clues weren't there, it's that they weren't understood well enough to be seen as the indicators of a serious problem.

What kinds of behaviors are we talking about? For the most part, they're not related directly to plotting attacks. They're more subtle. For instance, parents might see sudden personality changes in their children at home—becoming confrontational. Religious leaders might notice unexpected clashes over ideological differences. Teachers might hear a student expressing an interest in traveling to a conflict zone overseas. Or friends might notice a new interest in watching or sharing violent material.

The government is rarely in a position to observe these early signals, so we need to do more to help communities understand the warning signs, and then work together to intervene before an incident can occur, while always respecting our core commitment to protecting privacy and civil liberties. During the past several years, that's what we've attempted to do.

We've built partnerships and expanded our engagement with communities across the nation, especially those that may be targeted by extremist groups. We are working to improve our understanding of how and why people are drawn to violence. And we have made it a priority to uphold and defend the qualities from which we draw strength—our openness, our diversity, and our respect for the equal rights of all Americans.

We know all too well that Muslim-American, Sikh-American, Arab-American communities and others, including Jewish-Americans, have been victimized by violence that is rooted in ignorance and prejudice, in suspicion and fear. American Muslims and Americans of all faiths have enriched our

way of life – contributing to our safety and security as patriotic service members, police, firefighters, first responders. Violent extremism is not unique to any one faith. And, as Americans, we reject violence regardless of our faith.

Here in Massachusetts, over the past decade, government and law enforcement officials have built a dialogue to reinforce that shared commitment to non-violence and to build trust with a range of Boston-area communities. The local U.S. Attorney's office brings together representatives from federal agencies with community leaders, some of whom I just had the opportunity to meet. I can tell you, the benefits go both ways. Law enforcement is better able to understand the specific challenges these communities face, and community participants can bring their concerns directly to the government. We all care about keeping our families and neighborhoods safe.

These connections were critical in the chaotic days after the bombing – helping to minimize the potential for backlash against Muslim and Sikh communities. In Malden, after a local Muslim woman was assaulted, purportedly in retribution for the bombings, the Department of Justice Community Relations Service worked with local officials to request additional security for the local mosque. The Malden Chief of Police personally stood watch the first night.

Still, despite the broader security improvements we've put in place since 9/11, despite our outreach to reduce the risk of radicalization to violence, more work remains. We need a comprehensive prevention model that allows us to work with communities and intervene with at-risk individuals before violent extremism takes root. And we need to meet the evolving challenge, including terrorists' use of the internet to recruit those who are most vulnerable to violent extremist ideologies, whether it be from neo-Nazis or groups like al-Qaeda.

So today, as we honor the memory of all those who were killed and injured one year ago, we recommit ourselves to building greater resilience into our communities to resist the pull of violent extremism. We will continue to work closely with community leaders, local law enforcement and partners outside government who work with at-risk populations every day. Faith leaders, school teachers, police chiefs – and especially mothers and fathers and families – will always be the best positioned to identify individuals in a community who might be susceptible to radical messages and violence—and to help them resist hateful ideologies. So we must do more to connect those leaders to resources they need to be part of a comprehensive approach. Let me just briefly describe a few of the steps we're taking along those lines.

First, the Department of Homeland Security is building partnerships with key cities across the country to establish a locally-based envoy dedicated to coordinating government engagement on the threat of homegrown violent extremism. Piloted in Los Angeles, this effort has already helped focus our resources and strategic efforts by streamlining federal, state, and local outreach. And tonight I'm

proud to announce that the next such DHS envoy will be based in Boston.

Second, DHS is also going to make more resources available to officials countering violent extremism in their communities. Every year, DHS offers hundreds of millions of dollars in grant money to local law enforcement to bolster homeland security at the municipal and county level. Now, in addition to preparing to respond to an attack once it's happened, state and local officials can apply for these grants to explicitly develop models for preventing violent extremism in their communities, drawing on the expertise of social service providers, education administrators, mental health professionals, and religious leaders.

Finally, I want to mention the expertise developing right in your backyard. With support from the Department of Justice, the Children's Hospital of Boston is studying why some Somali refugees embrace violent extremism, while others move towards gangs and crime and still others channel their energies into non-violent activism. The answers to these kinds of questions will be essential to developing more effective models of intervention.

And here at Harvard, the Berkman Center is establishing a new research network dedicated to understanding and ultimately preventing radicalization to violence on the internet. Hate speech and extremism take on complex new dimensions and dangers when conducted online, and this will be a valuable asset as we strive to identify more effective ways to intervene and to address violent extremism in the internet age.

During the past year, Boston has been a crucible for our nation-wide efforts to counter violent extremism and enhance our focus on resilience. The bombings brought into sharp relief what we have been doing well and where we still need to hone our efforts. The programs that are operating here set the example for cities across the nations. And—as a Boston-girl, I say this with absolutely no surprise—the strength of the people of Boston made it wicked clear that this city and this country cannot be intimidated by the ideologies of hatred and violence that poison the hearts of a few disturbed individuals. We reject that thinking. And when people gather next Monday—in numbers as great and as proud as ever—to celebrate the running of the 118th Boston Marathon, it will also show that we reject the fear terrorism seeks to breed. It will show the true depth of what it means to be Boston Strong. Thank you.

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