

**JUSTICE NEWS****Attorney General Eric Holder Speaks at the Special Naturalization Ceremony in Washington, D.C.**Washington, D.C. ~ Tuesday, May 28, 2013

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Thank you, Director Mayorkas, for those kind words – and for all that you and your colleagues have done to bring us together today. I'd also like to thank District Director Taylor; Rhea Walker, of the Office of Justice Programs; and members of the Joint Armed Forces Color Guard for taking part in this important celebration. It's a pleasure to have you with us. And it's a special privilege to join so many friends, colleagues, and proud family members in welcoming each of our guests of honor to the United States Department of Justice – and congratulating these 70 remarkable men and women on becoming the newest members of our great and diverse American family.

This is an extraordinary occasion – and I'm so grateful for the chance to share it with you. Although the individual journeys that brought you to this moment began in 34 countries around the world – and although, in many cases, you've had to cross vast oceans and great cultural divides to be here – as of this morning, every one of you has earned the right to call this country your home. All of you have become indispensable parts of your communities and your new nation. No matter your profession, your background, or your reason for immigrating to the United States – each of you has come to embody the very best of what it means to be an American. And you're already living up to your newfound obligations as citizens by strengthening our country, displaying exemplary leadership, and making meaningful contributions.

Among the new citizens in this crowd today, we welcome a World Bank senior advisor, a community outreach professional, and a salesperson – all of whom are members of the same family from Pakistan. We welcome a doctor from Syria who has devoted his life to helping others, and a filmmaker from Kosovo who works hard to bring compelling stories to the big screen. We welcome a linguist from Afghanistan who risked his life in order to work with the U.S. military to improve – and rebuild – the country of his birth. And we welcome a nonprofit executive from Colombia who leads an organization that provides assistance to landmine victims and people with disabilities throughout Southeast Asia.

Like millions who came before you – and whose contributions have shaped and reshaped the country we live in today – these leaders, and every one of their peers in this crowd, have demonstrated remarkable faith in the principles of equality, opportunity, and justice that have always stood at the core of our identity as a nation. Many of you have faced great difficulties – and grave dangers – to reach this moment. But every one of you persevered. And your individual stories prove the enduring promise of the American dream.

For centuries, this dream has led courageous men and women from every corner of the globe to set their sights on our shores – driven by little more than their hope for a better life, and a brighter future, for themselves and their children. Many years ago, this dream inspired my own family to come to the United States, just as it inspired all of you. Although I was born and raised in New York City, I'm proud to say I grew up in a home infused with traditions and values that my father – and all four of my grandparents – brought with them from the great island of Barbados. I was fortunate to spend many of my formative years in a neighborhood populated largely by immigrants – among wonderful, hardworking people who understood the importance of family, championed education, and constantly reinforced the values of

tolerance and respect.

Their vision – of progress and opportunity; of fairness and equality; and, above all, of justice – continues to inspire me even today. Especially this week, as our nation pauses to observe Memorial Day, it challenges each of us to carry on – and carry forward – the work of all those who have fought and sacrificed to keep the great American experiment in motion. And it calls us to the service of the nation we love, the protection of our fellow citizens, and the pursuit of our highest ideals.

Here at the Justice Department, this pursuit goes on in our daily efforts to reduce crime and violence, to combat fraud, to guard against national security threats, and to protect the most vulnerable members of society. These ideals guide our work to eradicate racial and ethnic discrimination, to fairly adjudicate immigration cases, and to hold accountable employers who knowingly hire undocumented workers or engage in discriminatory practices. These values drive our enforcement activities, particularly when it comes to civil rights protections for immigrants – the importance of which I reflect upon each morning as I walk past the mural that's depicted on the front of your programs, which adorns a wall just outside of my office.

More broadly, these same principles are also driving the Administration's efforts to reform America's broken immigration system in a way that is fair; that guarantees that all are playing by the same rules; and that requires responsibility from everyone – including those who are here in an undocumented status and employers who would hire or attempt to exploit them. As President Obama has made clear, the time for comprehensive, commonsense immigration reform is now. And the way we treat our friends and neighbors who are undocumented – and the steps we take to allow an estimated 11 million unauthorized immigrants to earn citizenship and move out of the shadows – transcends the issue of immigration status.

It's about who we are as a nation – and as a people. It's why my colleagues and I are firmly committed to working with Members of Congress to refine and advance proposals – like the bipartisan legislation recently approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee – which will help to make our nation stronger, more secure, and more prosperous. And it's why we're also seeking ways to modernize our legal immigration system – so citizens like you don't have to wait years for loved ones to be able to join you here in the United States.

Making these improvements – and ensuring that this country will always be able to welcome leaders, entrepreneurs, artists, innovators, and hard workers like all of you – is nothing less than a moral imperative. But it's also good policy. Especially in this time of economic uncertainty – as we move into an age of unprecedented global competition – the ideas, the optimism, and the energy of the talented men and women before me will be as critical as ever before in preserving the promise of the American dream; honoring the American story in its most basic form; and ensuring that our country stays true to its proud history as a nation made up of, and – let us never forget, a nation built by – immigrants.

Today, we come together to celebrate this history – and to reaffirm our collective resolve to carrying this legacy into the future. This won't always be easy. But it's a solemn responsibility that's codified in the oath you took a few moments ago, and the pledge we're about to recite together. It's a call that everyone in this crowd is now uniquely qualified to answer. And it's an obligation that has been entrusted to each of you – by virtue of your new status as citizens of the United States.

I congratulate you, once again, on this extraordinary moment. I thank you for allowing me to share it with you. And I'd like to invite one of our new citizens – Daniela Wagner-Loera, from Germany – to conclude this morning's ceremony by leading us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Daniela is a teacher and a lecturer at the University of Maryland, where she helps international students and

her fellow immigrants to learn English and adjust to American culture. She is also the proud wife of a United States Marine. Please join me in welcoming her to the stage.