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Fighting Hate
Teaching Tolerance
Seeking Justice

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Attorney General Eric Holder
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Secretary Janet Napolitano
Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear General Holder and Secretary Napolitano:

On October 25, 1994, six months before the Oklahoma City bombing, we wrote Attorney General Janet Reno about the growing threat of domestic terrorism. Today, we write to express similar concerns. In the last four years, we have seen a tremendous increase in the number of conspiracy-minded, antigovernment groups as well as in the number of domestic terrorist plots. As in the period before the Oklahoma City bombing, we now also are seeing ominous threats from those who believe that the government is poised to take their guns. Because of the looming dangers, we urge you to establish an interagency task force to assess the adequacy of the resources devoted to responding to the growing threat of non-Islamic domestic terrorism.

Today, we are releasing our latest report on the state of hate and extremism in the nation. The report documents that the number of militias and radical antigovernment groups grew from 149 in 2008 to 1,360 in 2012. This latest count exceeds the high-water mark of the 1990s by more than 500. During that decade, the growth in the radical antigovernment movement was fueled in large part by anger over the passage of the Brady Bill in 1993 and the enactment of the assault weapons ban in 1994. Now that gun control is again being hotly debated, we are seeing a repeat of that anger, and it is likely to continue to swell the ranks of antigovernment groups.

In January, for example, a former Tennessee police chief who conducts weapons training for law enforcement officials threatened in a video posted on YouTube to “start killing people” if President Obama uses his executive power to enact gun control measures. Similarly, an antigovernment movement leader in Montana said he was “prepared to become an outlaw” over the gun issue. When U.S. Rep. Diana DeGette proposed a ban on high-capacity magazines, a well-known neo-Nazi posted her address, along with photos of her and her husband, on a racist Internet forum. Although individuals who make incendiary public statements may not act on them, their rhetoric is a barometer of the rage that is building in certain quarters.

Our report also documents that hate groups remain at record highs. The expansion of hate groups began not in 2008 but in 2000 as a reaction to the country’s changing demographics.

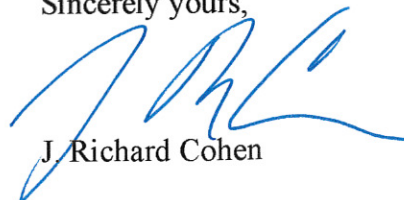
Now that comprehensive immigration reform is poised in the view of some to legitimize those demographic changes, the backlash that we've seen over the last decade may accelerate as well. A recent study sponsored by the Department of Homeland Security, it should be noted, found that criminal violence was associated with a significant percentage of far-right hate groups. See Steven M. Chermak, Joshua D. Freilich, Michael Suttmoeller, *The Organizational Dynamics of Far-Right Hate Groups in the United States* at 2, DHS, Dec. 2011.

Our data as well as that of independent researchers reflects that the country has seen an increase in right-wing domestic terrorism as the number of hate and antigovernment groups has increased in recent years. A new study by West Point's Combating Terrorism Center, for example, found that right-wing violence in the 2000-2011 period surpassed that of the 1990s by a factor of four. See Arie Perliger, *Challengers from the Sidelines: Understanding America's Violent Far-Right*, Combating Terrorism Center, Jan. 15, 2013. A report by the Congressional Research Service found that domestic terrorists have orchestrated more than two-dozen incidents since 9/11. See Jerome P. Bjelopera, *The Domestic Terrorist Threat: Background and Issues for Congress*, CRS, May 15, 2012. The data we've collected reflects a significant uptick in racist crimes and terrorist plots in the last four years. See SPLC, *Terror from the Right: Plots, Conspiracies and Racist Rampages since Oklahoma City* (2013).

The resources devoted to countering domestic hate and radical antigovernment groups and those they may inspire do not appear commensurate with the threat. A 2006-07 survey of state police agencies sponsored by the Department of Homeland Security found that more states reported the presence of far-right antigovernment, neo-Nazi, and racist skinhead groups than Islamic extremists. Joshua D. Freilich, Steven M. Chermak, Joseph Simone, Jr., *Surveying American State Police Agencies and Terrorism Threats, Terrorism Sources, and Terrorism Definitions*, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21:3 at 461-63 (2009). Since that survey was conducted, the number of far-right antigovernment groups has exploded and the number of neo-Nazi and racist skinhead groups has remained at a high level. At the same time, serious questions have been raised about the level of resources that are now being devoted to assessing the threat of non-Islamic terrorism. See, e.g., *Hate Crimes and the Threat of Domestic Extremism: Before the S. Subcomm. on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights of the S. Comm. on the Judiciary*, 112th Cong. (2012) (statement of Daryl Johnson); R. Jeffrey Smith, *Homeland Security Department Curtails Home-Grown Terror Analysis*, *Washington Post*, June 7, 2011. In light of these questions and the disturbing trends we have described in this letter, we believe it is time to take a fresh look at the issue.

Please feel free to contact us if we can be of any assistance.

Sincerely yours,



J. Richard Cohen