

# AG Eric Holder Invokes Trayvon Martin Case in Speech to Detroit NAACP

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By Susan Jones

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(CNSNews.com) - Despite "significant" progress in civil rights, the nation is still struggling to "overcome injustice" and "eliminate disparities," Attorney General Eric Holder told the Detroit chapter of the NAACP on Sunday.

The attorney general also mentioned Trayvon Martin by name, as he decried the violence and crime involving young people.

"This (violence) is an issue that has -- rightly -- garnered significant national attention in recent months, as our nation has struggled to make sense of the tragic shooting death of a Florida teenager named Trayvon Martin," Holder said. "As this case moves through the legal system, Justice Department officials will continue to communicate closely with state and local authorities to ensure that community concerns are heard, tensions are alleviated, and -- as with every investigation at every level -- appropriate actions are guided by the facts and the law."

The Justice Department is now investigating whether any federal civil rights laws were violated in Martin's death at the hands of a neighborhood watch captain in Florida. The suspect, George Zimmerman, says he shot the 17-year-old black teenager in self-defense. The case has rallied civil rights activists, who blasted police for not immediately charging Zimmerman with a crime.

Holder on Sunday told the Detroit NAACP that "as we all know, the reality is that certain aspects of this case are far from unique. And incidents of violence involving young people are anything but rare."

Holder told the gathering that both he and President Obama are "direct beneficiaries" of the work done by the NAACP. But he also said the group's work is far from over: "[D]espite the significant, once-unimaginable advances that have marked the century since this group convened its first meetings...the unfortunate fact is that, in 2012, our nation's long struggle to overcome injustice, to eliminate disparities, to bridge long-standing divisions, and to eradicate violence has not yet ended."

## 'Fairness'

Holder praised the Detroit NAACP for the way it is responding to the challenges it faces: "You're fighting to safeguard civil rights, to ensure embattled voting rights, and to expand learning and employment opportunities in every community. And you're working...to strengthen our criminal justice system, to achieve fairness in our immigration and sentencing policies, and to prevent and combat violence and crime, especially among our young people."

Holder said the Obama administration has made an "unprecedented commitment" to protecting children's safety. And he touted the Justice Department's work in overcoming division and disparity:

"Over the past three years, the Department's Civil Rights Division has filed more criminal civil rights cases than ever before, including record numbers of police misconduct, hate crimes, and human trafficking cases. We've moved aggressively to combat continuing racial segregation in schools and to eliminate discriminatory practices in our housing and lending markets.

"We've taken decisive action to vigorously enforce the 1965 Voting Rights Act, our nation's most important civil rights statute, by challenging attempts to disenfranchise many of our fellow citizens." Holder has criticized voter ID laws as discriminatory, and the Justice Department is challenging such laws in Texas and South Carolina.

"Across the administration, we're working in a range of other innovative ways to achieve fairness and expand opportunity -- from successfully advocating for the reduction of the unfair and unjust 100-to-1 sentencing disparity between crack and powder cocaine offenses -- to launching a new, Department-wide Diversity Management Initiative," Holder said.

He urged the NAACP -- which he counts as a partner to the Justice Department -- to "take up the unfinished struggle for equal opportunity and justice."



**Attorney General Eric Holder said the Justice Department will take appropriate action in the killing of Trayvon Martin if it finds evidence that a federal criminal civil rights crime has been committed. (AP Photo/Susan Walsh, File)**

"The creation of that better America is within our grasp," Holder said.

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