



## NATIONAL CHURCH ARSON TASK FORCE



*P. O. Box 65798  
Washington, D.C. 20530*

The President  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

Three years ago, in response to a sharp rise in reported attacks on our Nation's houses of worship, especially on African American churches in the South, you called upon all Americans to come together in a spirit of respect and reconciliation to help victimized congregations. You made the investigation and prevention of church arson a national priority and directed the formation of the National Church Arson Task Force (NCATF or Task Force). Since June 1996, the Task Force has coordinated a nationwide federal, state, and local law enforcement effort to identify and prosecute those who burn or damage our houses of worship, to help rebuild those houses of worship, to prevent additional fires, and to help heal community tensions resulting from attacks on our houses of worship.

We are pleased to report that the Task Force continues to achieve marked success. The number of church arsons continues on a downward trend. As we reported last year, we have achieved this, in part, due to increased vigilance, well-publicized arrests, and ongoing prevention efforts under your Administration's three-pronged strategy.

These accomplishments notwithstanding, we must remain vigilant. Fires continue to be reported. As last summer's synagogue fires in Sacramento, California demonstrate, arson affecting America's houses of worship is a problem that cuts across denominational, racial, and geographic lines. Accordingly, we will continue aggressively to investigate these fires and prosecute those found responsible.

Today, we are pleased to present the Third Year Report of the NCATF. To date:

- The NCATF has opened investigations into 827 arsons, bombings or attempted bombings that have occurred at houses of worship between January 1, 1995 and October 5, 1999.
- Federal, state, and local law enforcement officials have arrested 364 suspects in connection with 294 incidents.
- NCATF's 35.6 percent rate of arrest is over twice the 16 percent rate nationwide.

- Federal and state prosecutors have successfully obtained convictions of 287 defendants in connection with 206 arsons or bombings at houses of worship occurring between January 1, 1995 and October 5, 1999. Of that number, federal prosecutors have successfully obtained convictions of 39 defendants in connection with 24 arsons or bombings of houses of worship occurring between January 1, 1995 and October 5, 1999 that were motivated by bias. Other defendants are awaiting trial.
- The Community Relations Service (CRS) has helped over 250 localities heal community tensions and rebuild community trust in the aftermath of attacks on our houses of worship.

We are pleased to be able to report to you on an important investigative development. On April 20, 1999, the United States returned two indictments charging Jay Scott Ballinger with a series of church arsons. Additional charges were filed against Mr. Ballinger later in the year, to include conspiracy to commit arson at 29 churches in eight states. As a result, the Ballinger indictments represent the largest number of fires linked to a single defendant during the life of the Task Force. We report more fully on these and related indictments in the enclosed report.

In its third year, the Task Force has effectively integrated its work into existing federal law enforcement structures and taken steps to ensure that church arson prosecutions will be a permanent priority. The innovative and highly successful protocols and best practices for the joint investigation and prosecution of suspected church arsonists that were developed by the NCATF Operations Team have been integrated into the operations of the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, the United States Attorneys' offices, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and have become a regular part of federal law enforcement efforts. Responsibility for federal prosecution of church arsons and bombings motivated by race and religion has been lodged in the Criminal Section of the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, which has jurisdiction over these and other federal criminal civil rights cases. Regional offices of the Community Relations Service have assumed responsibility for the work of the CRS Church Burning Response Team to help heal community tensions resulting from church arson.

At the same time, ATF and the FBI, in close partnership with state and local law enforcement, continue to investigate every arson, bombing, and attempted bombing at houses of worship in the United States. The Department of Housing and Urban Development continues to work with the National Council of Churches, the Congress of National Black Churches, leading financial institutions, and others to help victimized congregations rebuild. The Federal Emergency Management Agency continues its extensive prevention initiative. Through these and other permanent mechanisms, the Task Force remains committed to expending the time, resources, and effort necessary to solve and prevent racially or religiously motivated arsons at our Nation's houses of worship.

We wish to commend the Task Force co-chairs, Treasury Under Secretary James E. Johnson and Acting Assistant Attorney General Bill Lann Lee, for their continuing dedication as the Task Force has institutionalized its practices and mission into the work of its constituent offices and agencies. The Task Force's success could not have been achieved without the demonstrated commitment of the special agents from ATF and the FBI. Justice Department and local prosecutors, state and local law enforcement officials, CRS conciliators, and countless other individuals have also contributed to this successful effort.

The enclosed report details the progress of the Task Force's efforts to date. We would be pleased to brief you in more detail.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. H. Summers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Lawrence H. Summers  
Secretary of the Treasury

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Janet Reno". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized, with a large initial "J".

Janet Reno  
Attorney General

Enclosure