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**Subject:** JOINT STATEMENT OF ATTORNEY GENERAL ASHCROFT AND SECRETARY OF HOMELAND SECURITY TOM RIDGE

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Office of the Press Secretary

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE February 27, 2003

JOINT STATEMENT OF ATTORNEY GENERAL JOHN ASHCROFT  
AND SECRETARY OF HOMELAND SECURITY TOM RIDGE

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Based on a review of intelligence and an assessment of threats by the intelligence community, the Attorney General in consultation with the Homeland Security Council has made the decision to return the threat level to an elevated risk of terrorist attack, or "yellow" level.

The decision to raise the threat level on February 7 was based on specific intelligence, corroborated by multiple intelligence sources, received and analyzed by the full intelligence community at the time. Today's decision to lower the threat level was based on a careful review of how this specific intelligence has evolved and progressed over the past three weeks, as well as counter-terrorism actions we have taken to address specific aspects of the threat situation.

Among the factors we considered was the passing of the time period in or around the end of the Hajj, a Muslim religious period ending mid-February 2003.

The lowering of the threat level is not a signal to government, law enforcement or citizens that the danger of a terrorist attack is passed. Returning to the elevated level of risk is only an indication that some of the extra protective measures enacted by government and the private sector may be reduced at this time.

We emphasize that the United States and its interests are still at a significant risk of terrorist attack. Detained al Qaeda operatives have informed U.S. intelligence and law enforcement officials that al Qaeda will wait until it believes Americans are less vigilant and less prepared before it will strike again. For this reason, and for the safety and security of our nation, Americans must continue to be defiant and alert. We must always be prepared to respond to a significant risk of terrorist attacks.

The American people serve as our strongest defense against terrorism. We ask all citizens to be aware of any suspicious activity and to report it to local authorities or the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The nation's Homeland Security Advisory System provides a national framework to inform and facilitate the decisions of federal, state and local government as well as private individuals at home and at work. The system indicates protective measures commensurate with the current threat level to be taken to reduce the nation's vulnerability to terrorist attack.

At the elevated risk level, significant security measures will remain in place at all federal agencies. Examples of these include:

\* A focus on critical facilities and vulnerabilities, with security and surveillance tailored to meet specific intelligence reports and security needs.

- \* Continued increased surveillance.
- \* Random inspections of passenger vehicles entering parking lots and restricted parking as necessary.
- \* Continued coordination of emergency plans with state and federal jurisdictions and private sector partners.
- \* One hundred percent identification check of personnel entering facilities.
- \* Screening procedures remain in place for incoming office mail and other deliverables.

We thank all federal, state and local government and law enforcement officials, representatives of the private sector, and individual citizens for your patience and resolve. Know that your efforts are making a difference. And know, as well, that through our collective efforts, we send a signal to those who would do us harm that America stands alert, united, and prepared.

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