



NEW YORK CITY LAW DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE CORPORATION COUNSEL

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Speeches

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For Immediate Release

**LAW DEPARTMENT'S PUBLIC SERVICE INVOLVEMENT DURING
SEPTEMBER 11TH AFTERMATH**

**SPEECH GIVEN BY MICHAEL A. CARDOZO TO SENIOR LAWYERS COMMITTEE AND GUESTS OF THE
ASSOCIATION OF THE BAR OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK AT THE CITY BAR ASSOCIATION ON
OCTOBER 3, 2002**

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Let me add my own perspective to the Bar's response to 9/11. While I was not Corporation Counsel on that terrible day -- I did not take office until the first of this year -- I would like to offer you my observations as the Chief Legal Officer of New York City.

September 11 changed each of our lives forever. Some of us lost loved ones; virtually all of us lost friends. And every single one of us faced the question of how we would respond to this terrible tragedy.

That question has been answered with respect to many attorneys in this City. We responded to the catastrophe as compassionate and decent people acting in the very best sense of what lawyers do best; helping others. Tonight we salute the bar which responded so magnificently to the challenge of 9/11. While 9/11 was the worst of times it was also, as Chief Judge Kaye has said, a "shining hour for the New York Bar."

The extraordinary heroism of the firefighters, police, and the rescue and cleanup workers has been told over and over again. They have received well-deserved accolades. But the Bar's unselfish, heroic and compassionate response to the events of 9/11 is one of the great untold stories of September 11. It is essential that this compelling story be told, to the world at large and to our profession. And it is vital that the legal initiative spirit of 9/11 be expanded and built upon.

As lawyers each of us know that we are supposed to "render public interest and pro bono legal service." But despite that admonition in our Code of Professional Responsibility, and the incredible number of good works lawyers carry out day in and day out, the image of our profession is too often one composed of aggressive, hostile, money grubbing people who too often engage in questionable ethical dealings. Anyone who takes but a moment to consider what the Bar did in response to 9/11 should understand how incredibly unfair and inaccurate that picture is.

My own NYC Law Dept is a prime example. On September 11 the over 600 Law Department lawyers whose offices were across the street from the World Trade Center narrowly escaped death as the twin towers literally collapsed around and upon their building. Within days the entire Law Department was working again, from temporary offices -- including space generously donated by the law firms and corporations for whom many of you work. As most of you may know, numerous Law Department attorneys and staff worked at Pier 94 on the death certificate project; an effort that enabled families of the victims to obtain death certificates on an expedited basis, rather than the two to three years that would ordinarily have been the case when a body cannot be located. But this project would have failed but for the assistance of volunteer lawyers, including many of you in this room, whom the Law Department trained and supervised. The result of this collaborative effort was that more than 2,200 applications were speedily and efficiently filed with the court so that the needed certificates could be promptly issued.

Last month, during the 9/11 anniversary ceremonies, many of the lawyers in my office were moved to tears as the names of the victims were recited and scrolled on the television screens. They remembered, as I am sure many of you did as well, the families of and stories about particular victims whom they had helped at Pier 94. What was done during the death certificate project, and the countless other post 9/11 pro bono efforts by lawyers carried on in this city, has an importance beyond words. As one lawyer said: "This is why I became a lawyer; to help other people."

Everyone in this room should know that you performed for the public good at the highest level of our profession. On behalf of a grateful City, and Mayor Bloomberg, I cannot thank you enough.

Conclusion

Let me just take one more minute of your time. 9/11 reminded us how important it is to help those less fortunate. But we cannot stop our efforts; instead we must redouble them. We must build on the spirit of 9/11 and move forward. In that connection I want to announce that the New York City Corporation Counsel's Office has just initiated a major pro bono project of its own. The lawyers in my office are being specifically encouraged, in all sorts of ways, to undertake pro bono efforts and to work with established pro bono organizations to help those less fortunate. Approval for this Program has been obtained from the New York City Conflicts of Interest Board. A meeting with various pro bono providers with our lawyers has been scheduled. I hope that other public law offices in the City will follow our example so that public sector lawyers, as well as those in the private and corporate sectors, will do even more to help people in need.

We all need to remind ourselves and our colleagues, particularly those who have not yet participated in pro bono efforts, of the satisfaction this kind of work gives, and its importance to everyone who is helped as a result. With the spirit in this room, and the good deeds you have already done, I am hopeful that the Bar of this City will do even more to help those in need.

Thank you.

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