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Hostages

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

January 26, 1987

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

All Americans, I know, share my outrage at the latest kidnappings of our citizens in Lebanon. Not only Americans, but more than 20 citizens from nine countries are now being held by terrorist groups there. Today my sympathy goes out to the friends and relatives of all these hostages.

The terrorists appear to believe that by trafficking in human lives, they can force sovereign governments to give in to their demands. But our government will not make concessions to terrorist groups despite their threats.

- For to give in to terrorist blackmail would only encourage more terrorism;
- To yield to their demands now would only endanger the lives of many others later.

I would like to add a special word to Americans in Lebanon.

Where U.S. citizens are unjustly deprived of their God-given rights, the U.S. Government has an obligation to try to restore those rights. But there is a limit to what our government can do for Americans in a chaotic situation such as that in Lebanon today. In particular, the situation in West Beirut has deteriorated to total anarchy with armed criminal groups taking the law into their own hands.

For the past twelve years, our government has regularly warned American citizens against travel to Lebanon. As recently as last Tuesday, we reiterated our assessment that the situation there is "extremely dangerous." The events of the past week provide striking confirmation of that assessment. Americans who ignored this warning clearly did so at their own risk and on their own responsibility. This weekend the U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon again was in contact with remaining Americans and advised them to leave.

Those who hold hostages, regardless of nationality, should release them immediately and unconditionally. Their acts of terror constitute a declaration of war on civilized society. I again join with civilized countries in condemnation of terrorist outrages.

In conclusion, let me stress again that our government remains unrelenting and alert in its search for opportunities to secure the release of our citizens no matter how long that may take.

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