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Bill of Rights Day Human Rights Day and Week, 1982

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

On December 15, 1791, our Founding Fathers celebrated the ratification of the first ten Amendments to the Constitution of the United States—a Bill of Rights which from that moment forward helped shape a nation unique in the annals of history. The Bill of Rights became the formal and legal expression of our liberties and of the principles embodied in the Declaration of Independence.

The Founding Fathers derived their principles of limited government from a belief in natural law, that is, the concept that our Creator had ordained a framework for society giving great importance to individual freedom, expression, and responsibility. They held that each person had certain natural rights bestowed on him by God. As Jefferson put it, "the God who gave us life gave us liberty."

It is with glad hearts and thankful minds that on Bill of Rights Day we recognize and honor this great gift of liberty bequeathed to posterity by the Founding Fathers.

One hundred and fifty-seven years later, on December 10, 1948, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. By jointly celebrating this anniversary with Bill of Rights Day, we acknowledge the necessary link between human rights and constitutional democracy. As stated in the Universal Declaration, we must staunchly pursue our conviction that freedom is not the sole prerogative of the fortunate few, but the inalienable and universal right of all human beings. Throughout history and from all parts of the globe, man's instinctive desire for freedom and true self-determination have surfaced again and again. Democracy has provided the best and most enduring expression of man's search for individual rights.

We can point to many nations in the world where there is real progress toward the development of democratic institutions. The people of some of those countries have fully demonstrated their commitment to democratic principles by participating in elections under difficult and even life-threatening circumstances. Such displays of courage can only inspire confidence in the future of democracy for all people.

But in December of 1982 our satisfaction in the progress toward human rights is darkened by our realization that one year ago, on December 13, 1981, the Polish military government took steps to extinguish the flames of liberty ignited by Solidarity. As that totalitarian regime moved to crush Solidarity, it laid siege to the dreams and aspirations of a whole people reaching out for freedom, independence, and essential human dignity. The tragedy of the iron suppression of the Polish people transcends the borders of that land and reaches into the hearts of all of us who care for the rights and well-being of people everywhere.

On these important anniversaries let us remember the great and abiding love of freedom that dwells perpetually within the heart of mankind. And let us also hope and pray that the blessings of liberty will one day be shared by all people.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim December 10, 1982, as Human Rights Day and December 15, 1982, as Bill of Rights Day, and call on all Americans to observe the week beginning December 10, 1982, as Human Rights Week.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I hereunto set my hand this 10th day of December, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-two, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and seventh.

Ronald Reagan