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Lithuanian Independence Day, 1988

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Seventy years ago, on February 16, 1918, the Lithuanian National Council declared the independence of Lithuania and established the Republic of Lithuania. This restoration of Lithuania's sovereignty was recognized around the world—even by the Soviet Union, in 1920. Lithuania joined the League of Nations in 1921, and for the next two decades Lithuanians enjoyed liberty and self-determination under a government that fostered political and religious freedom for all citizens.

Then, in June 1940, the year after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Soviet Union invaded and illegally occupied Lithuania and the other Baltic States. The United States unequivocally condemned this violation of national sovereignty and national integrity, and ever since then our policy has remained consistent. We have never recognized the forcible incorporation of Lithuania into the Soviet Union, and we never will.

Observance of the anniversary of Lithuania's Declaration of Independence is natural for Americans, who faithfully celebrate our own Independence Day each year. America has long been a beacon of hope to Lithuania, because Americans cherish their self-determination, individual liberty, and independence—the God-given rights the Lithuanian people seek to reclaim in the face of religious and political persecution, forced Russification, and ethnic dilution. It is therefore fitting to show our solidarity with the people of Lithuania.

We join in Lithuania's proud and solemn remembrance of the 70th anniversary of its independence, and together with people the world over we share the spirit and the hope of the Lithuanian people as they commemorate that day. Among the Lithuanian people the spirit of liberty remains unbroken—the spirit of a true leader of her people, Nijole Sadunaite, whose sacrifices for country and conscience continue so courageously to the present day, and who wrote from the Gulag, "Our brief days on earth are not meant for rest, but to participate in the struggle for the happiness of numerous hearts"; the spirit of the freedom marchers of Vilnius, Lithuania's capital, and of Kaunas; the spirit of every time and place where bold sons and daughters remember their heritage and their highest ideals.

To demonstrate our common commitment to the cause of freedom, the Congress, by Senate Joint Resolution 39, has designated February 16, 1988, as "Lithuanian Independence Day" and has authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation in observance of this day.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim February 16, 1988, as Lithuanian Independence Day. I call upon the people of the United States to observe this day with appropriate ceremonies and activities in reaffirmation of their devotion to the just aspirations of all peoples for self-determination and liberty.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 11th day of February, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twelfth.

Ronald Reagan