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## Religious Freedom Week, 1988

*By the President of the United States of America*

### A Proclamation

America's creed of liberty has never been expressed better than in the words of the Book of Leviticus emblazoned on the Liberty Bell, "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof." The American people have long recognized that the liberty we cherish must include the freedom to worship God as each of us pleases. We can all rejoice in noting that a critical step in the history of this freedom was taken nearly two centuries ago this month.

On September 25, 1789, the Congress proposed and sent to the States for ratification a series of 10 Amendments to the new Constitution. This Bill of Rights would safeguard and perpetuate the rights and liberties for which the American people had fought the War of Independence and the States had ratified the Constitution. Because of the First Amendment's vital clauses—"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; . . ."—the 199th anniversary of the introduction of the Bill of Rights is a fitting time to begin a week in celebration of religious freedom.

The religious liberty described in this Amendment is the protection of religion and conscience from government interference. It creates neither hostility between government and religion nor a civil religion of secularism. The fundamental principle of religious liberty, that government can neither forbid nor force the people's practice of religion, was essential to the founding of our Nation. Our leaders knew that faith blesses men and nations alike as it fosters morality and justice. George Washington stated in his Farewell Address, "Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle." The Northwest Ordinance of 1787, which the Congress reenacted in 1789, similarly stated, "Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of learning shall forever be encouraged."

The Founders realized that we must guard freedom of religion with eternal vigilance against tyranny and bigotry. Washington emphasized this in a letter to Moses Seixas of the Hebrew Congregation of Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1790. Our first President noted Americans' "liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship" and said that it was not "by the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise, of their inherent natural rights." Rather, "happily the Government of the United States, . . . gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance. . . ."

President Washington proudly called this policy "enlarged and liberal" and "worthy of imitation." Through the years, Americans of goodwill have echoed these sentiments, seeking freedom, brotherhood, justice, and reconciliation. We will always do so if we continue to revere the First Amendment's protection of religious freedom.

The Congress, by House Joint Resolution 518, has designated the week of September 25, 1988, as "Religious Freedom Week."

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim the week beginning September 25, 1988, as Religious Freedom Week. I urge the people of the United States to observe this week with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-seventh day of September, 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 thirteenth.

*Ronald Reagan*