1997 Compilation—Presidential Documents

PROCLAMATIONS

Proclamation 6966 of January 16, 1997

Religious Freedom Day, 1997

By the President of the United States of America
A Proclamation

Every day, in neighborhoods and communities across our Nation, Americans come together to worship and to reaffirm their most deeply held spiritual values. Our right to worship freely—each in our own way—is essential to our well-being. Religious Freedom Day offers us an invaluable opportunity to reflect on this precious human right and to give thanks for its protection in our Nation.

Freedom from religious persecution was of such profound importance to our founders that they placed it first among the freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. History has proved the wisdom of that decision. America's commitment to religious tolerance has empowered us to achieve an atmosphere of understanding, trust, and respect in a society of diverse cultures and religious traditions. And today, much of the world still looks to the United States as the champion of religious liberty.

Yet, even in America, we must be ever vigilant in protecting the freedoms so important to our ancestors and so admired by people throughout the world. The church arsons and the desecration of synagogues and mosques in recent years demonstrated for us all that our country is not entirely free from violence and religious hatred. My Administration took quick and decisive action, including working with the Congress to help churches rebuild and to prevent future incidents. And I am pleased that the American people are coming together as a national community to speak out against such crimes and to renew the climate of trust and tolerance so that all our people can worship without fear.

We must also support the aspirations of ethnic and religious minorities in other nations as they strive for their own right to worship freely. My Administration has established the Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad to provide counsel on how best to prevent persecution and promote reconciliation among people of different faiths. I invite all nations to join us in supporting individuals in houses of worship around the world as they exercise one of the most sacred of human rights.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, 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 January 16, 1997, as Religious Freedom Day. I call upon the people of the United States to observe this day with appropriate ceremonies and activities, and I urge them to reaffirm their commitment to the principle of religious freedom.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this sixteenth day of January, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-first.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

Proclamation 6967 of January 17, 1997

Martin Luther King, Jr., Federal Holiday, 1997

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

People throughout the world celebrate the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as a tribute to his shining example of love and justice.

Dr. King was a man of clear and powerful vision who offered an uncompromising message of brotherhood and hope at a time when violence and racial intolerance tore at the seams of our Nation. In addressing these ills, he often referred to what he called the ''magnificent words'' of the Declaration of Independence, which proclaimed that ''all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.'' He declared these words to be ''a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir,'' and upon which payment could no longer be delayed. Dr. King's struggle made it possible for all of us to move closer to the ideals set forth in the Declaration of Independence and in our Constitution.

Although ours is the most successful multiracial, multicultural society in human history, in the words of Dr. King, ''our work is not yet done.'' We have not yet fully realized Dr. King's dream of a Nation of full opportunity, genuine equality, and consistent fair play for all.

Every citizen must rise to meet that challenge because America's promise of freedom and opportunity cannot truly be realized for any of us until it is realized for every one of us. We all have an obligation to reach out to one another—across the artificial barriers of race, gender, religion, class, and age—so that each member of our society shares fully in the promise of the American Dream.