



Religious Freedom Day, 1993

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

We Americans have long cherished our identity as one Nation under God. To this day American law and institutions have been shaped by a view of man that recognizes the inherent rights and dignity of individuals. The Framers of our Government shared this view, and they never forgot the political and religious persecution that had forced their ancestors to flee Europe. Thus, it is not surprising that the first of all freedoms enumerated in our Bill of Rights is freedom of religion. The first amendment to our Constitution states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

As we reflect on our Constitution and Bill of Rights, we do well to acknowledge our debt to Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. These two men were instrumental in establishing the American tradition of religious liberty and tolerance. Thomas Jefferson articulated the idea of religious liberty in his 1777 draft Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom in Virginia. In that bill, he wrote:

. . . all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinion in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise . . . affect their civil capacities.

James Madison later introduced and championed this bill in the Virginia House of Delegates, where it passed in 1786. Following the Federal Constitutional Convention of 1787, James Madison led the way in drafting our Bill of Rights.

The religious freedom that James Madison and Thomas Jefferson helped to secure for us has been integral to the preservation and development of the United States. Over the years the exercise of our religious freedom has been instrumental in preserving the faith and the traditional values that are this Nation's greatest strengths. Moreover, the free exercise of religion goes hand in hand with the preservation of our other rights. As Thomas Jefferson noted, the first amendment "guard[s] in the same sentence, and under the same words, the freedom of religion, of speech, and of the press; insomuch as that whatever violates either throws down the sanctuary which covers the others." That sanctuary is the spirit of life, liberty, truth, and justice.

In that spirit, the United States has continued to champion religious liberty and tolerance around the world. We decry as reprehensible the persecution of ethnic and religious minorities, and we likewise condemn the resurgence of anti-Semitism and other forms of religious bigotry. The United States calls on all nations to respect the fundamental rights of individuals, in accordance with international human rights agreements and in recognition of the direct and inexorable relationship between freedom and justice and the achievement of lasting peace in the world.

The Congress, by House Joint Resolution 457, has designated January 16, 1993, as "Religious Freedom Day" and has requested the President to issue a proclamation in observance of this day.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE BUSH, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim January 16, 1993, as Religious Freedom Day. I urge all Americans to observe this day with appropriate ceremonies and activities in their homes, schools, and places of worship as an expression of our gratitude for the blessings of liberty and as a sign of our resolve to protect and preserve them.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this ninth day of December, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-two, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and seventeenth.

George Bush