
Presidential Documents

Title 3—

Proclamation 7063 of January 15, 1998

The President

Religious Freedom Day, 1998

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

The right to worship according to one's own conscience is essential to our dignity as human beings. Whatever our religious beliefs, they represent the essence of our personal values and cannot be dictated to us. Recognizing this truth, our founders made religious liberty the first freedom guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. They wisely understood as well that in protecting the free exercise of religion, we must also prohibit the establishment of religion by the state.

Among the early European settlers who came to our shores were many seeking to escape the religious compulsion and persecution they had endured in the lands of their birth. William Penn, Roger Williams, and many others would strive to make their settlements havens for freedom of conscience, laying the foundation for the great tradition of religious liberty that would ultimately find expression in the First Amendment to the Constitution. Since those early days, our continuing aspiration has been to banish lingering prejudice and increase religious understanding and respect among our people.

Today, millions of people of different faiths call America home. The churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, and other houses of worship they have built have become centers of community life and service and a source of strength for our Nation. As our country becomes increasingly diverse, we must reaffirm our efforts to reach out to one another and to see past our differences to the values we hold in common.

My Administration is striving to enhance this climate of acceptance and respect, bringing people together across lines of faith. Two years ago, with the help of a broad coalition of religious and civic leaders, we created guidelines clarifying the nature of religious expression permitted in our public schools and reaffirming that America's young people do not have to leave their religious beliefs at the schoolhouse door. With the help of that same coalition, I issued additional guidelines last August to reinforce the right of religious expression in the Federal workplace. Building on America's long-standing commitment to freedom and fairness, these guidelines will ensure that Federal employees may engage in personal religious expression to the greatest extent possible, consistent with workplace efficiency and the requirements of law. The guidelines also clarify that Federal employers may not discriminate in employment on the basis of religion and that an agency must reasonably accommodate employees' religious practices.

On Religious Freedom Day this year, as we celebrate and cherish this precious right we enjoy as Americans, we must not forget others who are less fortunate. Throughout the world, in many lands, too many people still suffer and die for their beliefs, and lives, families, and communities are torn apart by old hatreds and prejudices. We must continue to proclaim the fundamental right of all peoples to believe and worship according to their own conscience, to affirm their beliefs openly and freely, and to practice their faith without fear or intimidation. The priceless gift we have inherited from past generations will only grow in value as we share it with others.

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, 1998, as Religious Freedom Day. I call upon the people of the United States to observe this day with appropriate ceremonies, activities, and programs, and I urge all Americans to reaffirm their devotion to the fundamental principles of religious freedom and religious tolerance.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "William J. Clinton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "W" and "C".

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