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## Human Rights Day, Bill of Rights Day, and Human Rights Week, 1988

*By the President of the United States of America*

### A Proclamation

The second week in December commemorates two important dates. December 10 marks the 40th anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and December 15 marks the date almost 200 years ago when, in 1791, the first 10 amendments to the United States Constitution—our Bill of Rights—were ratified.

The human rights we regard today as inherent and unalienable were by no means universally accepted 2 centuries ago. Such rights as freedom of worship, speech, assembly, and the press were just beginning to be asserted by popular movements that would sweep Europe and elsewhere in the next century. The United States thus foreshadowed and fostered a powerful drive to improve the lot of mankind everywhere. During the drafting of our Constitution, Thomas Jefferson wrote that "a Bill of Rights is what people are entitled to against every government on earth."

Now, 200 years later, the Universal Declaration, enshrining many of the principles of our Founders, has become that worldwide Bill of Rights. Elaborating such a list of basic rights was one of the first tasks undertaken by the new United Nations Organization; the Chair of the drafting committee was Eleanor Roosevelt, who was later nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize for this work. Urging adoption of the Universal Declaration, then-Secretary of State George C. Marshall told the United Nations that "denials of basic human rights lie at the root of most of our troubles. . . . Governments which systematically disregard the rights of their own people," he said, "are not likely to respect the rights of other nations and other people." He called for adoption of the Universal Declaration as "a standard of conduct for us all."

The Universal Declaration, like our own Bill of Rights, starts from the premises that civil liberties and political freedom are the birthright of all mankind and that all of us are equal in the eyes of the law. Like our own Declaration of Independence, it also makes the inescapable connection between freedom, human rights, and government by the consent of the governed.

We are proud that the truths expressed by our Founding Fathers—America's source of strength, stability, and authority for more than 2 centuries—have also provided a standard for liberty and the rule of law emulated in dozens of other countries as well.

Nevertheless, many individuals and nations do not enjoy the rights enumerated in our Constitution and in the Universal Declaration. Some governments voice ringing guarantees but fall far short in practice. Some, such as Communist regimes, wrongly subordinate fundamental rights to other goals. These goals are often defined by political groups or parties that claim to know what is best for the individual and for peoples subject to their control. Fundamental goals—free elections and due process—are concepts not welcomed by dictators of any ideological or political stripe.

Despite this entrenched resistance of tyrants to practical guarantees of liberty, the Universal Declaration has done much to promote observance of human rights around the world. Over the past decade in particular we have seen great strides.

As we move toward the final decade of this century, we can truly say that the heroism, prayers, and sacrifices of countless heroes and heroines who have braved threats and persecution in the long struggle for human rights have produced noteworthy results. But we still have far to go. We must and will dedicate ourselves as a Nation to continue this effort, and to stand in solidarity with those who resist, until the blessings of democracy, freedom, and respect for human dignity are assured throughout the world.

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 December 10, 1988, as Human Rights Day, and December 15, 1988, as Bill of Rights Day, and I call upon all Americans to observe the week beginning December 10, 1988, as Human Rights Week.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 8th day of December, 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*