

Proclamation 7063—Religious Freedom Day, 1998

January 15, 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.

William J. Clinton

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NOTE: This proclamation was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 16, and it will be published in the *Federal Register* on January 21.

Statement on Action on Title III of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (LIBERTAD) Act of 1996
January 16, 1998

Today I am notifying the Congress of my decision to suspend for an additional 6 months the right of U.S. nationals to file suit against foreign firms trafficking in confiscated properties in Cuba. This decision is consistent with my strong commitment to implement the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act (LIBERTAD Act) in a way that best advances U.S. national interests and hastens a peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba.

I have taken this action to continue the effort we began in July 1996 to strengthen international cooperation in the effort to promote democracy in Cuba. I said last January and reaffirmed last July that I expected to continue suspending this provision of the LIBERTAD Act so long as our friends and allies continue their stepped-up efforts to promote a democratic transition in Cuba. I made this decision to take advantage of the growing realization throughout the world, in Europe and Latin America especially, that Cuba must change. We and our allies agree on the importance of promoting democracy, human rights, and fundamental freedoms in Cuba, and on the vital need for a peaceful transition to democracy on the island.

In the past 18 months, we have worked with our allies and friends to support concrete measures that promote peaceful change in Cuba. The international community is more united behind the cause of freedom in Cuba, and Fidel Castro is more isolated than ever before.

The European Union (EU) has reaffirmed its historic Common Position that, consistent with Europe's traditional democratic values, binds the 15 member nations to promote human rights and democracy in Cuba. The EU and its member states have strongly urged the Cuban Government to release imprisoned dissidents and stop the harassment

of those who seek peaceful democratic change. Recently, they have gone further and created an EU Working Group on Human Rights among their embassies in Havana. This will help coordinate the EU's human rights efforts in Cuba.

The international effort is not confined to Europe. Under Secretary of State Stuart Eizenstat made a trip to four Central American countries to energize their efforts to promote change in Cuba, with positive results. At the Ibero-American Summit in Venezuela in November 1997, leaders from Latin America and Europe made clear their position in favor of democracy and human rights. At the United Nations General Assembly in December, more countries than ever before co-sponsored the resolution supporting human rights in Cuba.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) are increasing their support for dissidents on the island and maintaining international attention to repression in Cuba. The Dutch organization, Pax Christi, noting the historic and spiritual importance of the visit of the Pope this month, has continued its call for political change in Cuba. Amnesty International called on Cuba to release the four dissidents of the Dissident Working Group who were arrested in July.

Business groups have also been active in the effort. The Trans Atlantic Business Dialogue, composed of chief executive officers of leading European and U.S. corporations, called for businesses operating internationally to observe "best business practices" and to support human rights in international operations, including in Cuba. On January 7 in Washington, DC, the North American Committee of the National Policy Association sponsored a major conference on best business practices in Cuba. This committee includes over 100 representatives from business, labor, and the academic community in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

As the multinational effort has moved forward, we have continued our vigorous implementation of title IV of the LIBERTAD Act, which denies entry to the U.S. of executives of firms that traffic in confiscated property in Cuba. Our implementation efforts have had a significant impact. Several companies