

**Proclamation 7162 of January 14, 1999****Religious Freedom Day, 1999**

*By the President of the United States of America  
A Proclamation*

On Religious Freedom Day we commemorate a landmark achievement in the history of our Nation: the adoption in 1786 by the Virginia legislature of a religious freedom statute. This historic legislation, drafted by Thomas Jefferson and co-sponsored by James Madison, was designed to prevent religious discrimination and to protect Virginians from pressure to join or support any church. It served as the model for the First Amendment of our Constitution, the guarantee of freedom of religion that has beckoned so many people fleeing persecution to seek sanctuary in this land.

Americans are a deeply religious people, and our right to worship as we choose, to follow our own personal beliefs, is the source of much of our Nation's strength. Our churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, and other houses of worship are centers of community service and community life. They preserve and promote the values and religious traditions that have infused our efforts to build a civil society based on mutual respect, compassion, and generosity. They provide our children with the moral compass to make wise choices.

America's reverence for religious freedom and religious tolerance has saved us from much of the hatred and violence that have plagued so many other peoples around the world. We have always been vigilant in protecting this freedom, but our efforts cannot stop at our own shores. We cannot ignore the suffering of men and women across the globe today who are harassed, imprisoned, tortured, and executed simply for seeking to live by their own beliefs. Freedom of religion is a fundamental human right that must be upheld by every nation and guaranteed by every government. The promotion of religious freedom for all peoples must continue to serve as a central element of our foreign policy.

Reflecting our steadfast commitment to this goal, last fall the Congress passed, and I was proud to sign into law, the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. This legislation enhances our ability to advance freedom of religion for men and women of all faiths throughout the world. It also establishes a new position at the Department of State—the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom—to ensure that religious liberty concerns receive consistent and appropriate attention at the highest policymaking levels.

On Religious Freedom Day, let us give thanks for this precious right that has so profoundly shaped and sustained our Nation, and let us strengthen our efforts to share its blessings with oppressed peoples everywhere.

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, 1999, 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 fourteenth day of January, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-nine, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-third.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

**Proclamation 7163 of January 15, 1999**

**Martin Luther King, Jr., Federal Holiday, 1999**

*By the President of the United States of America*

*A Proclamation*

January 15 would have marked the 70th birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a man of great vision and moral purpose whose dream for our Nation set into motion such powerful, sweeping changes that their impact is still being felt today. While he was taken from us too soon, we still have with us the gifts of his vision, convictions, eloquence, and example. We still hear the echo of his voice telling us that "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'"

We know what Dr. King did for others. He energized and mobilized a generation of Americans, black and white, to join in the struggle for civil rights, to respond to violence, hatred, and unjust incarceration with the spirit of peace, love, and righteousness. He taught us that we could not claim America as the land of justice, freedom, and equality as long as millions of our citizens continually and systematically faced discriminatory and oppressive treatment. He challenged us to recognize that the fundamental rights of all Americans are forever interconnected, for "we are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

Martin Luther King, Jr., awakened America's conscience to the immorality of racism. He was the driving force behind the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968. For African Americans, this landmark legislation meant that the opportunity for a quality education would no longer be impossible, the levers of the voting booth would no longer be out of reach, and the purchase of a dream home would no longer be unattainable. Millions of Americans—of every race and background and culture—live brighter lives today because of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dr. King's dream of unity for America did not die with him. Today, as our Nation becomes increasingly multiracial and multiethnic, his compelling vision is more important than ever, and the means for realizing it are now within our reach. This past year, as part of my Initiative on Race, Americans across the country participated in thousands of honest and open conversations about race in a sincere effort to heal our divisions and move toward genuine reconciliation. We learned much about the roots of prejudice; but more important, we learned much about how to overcome it. In community after community, in every field of endeavor from sports and education to business and reli-