

Proclamation 7517 of January 15, 2002**Religious Freedom Day, 2002**

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Religious freedom is a cornerstone of our Republic, a core principle of our Constitution, and a fundamental human right. Many of those who first settled in America, such as Pilgrims, came for the freedom of worship and belief that this new land promised. And when the British Colonies became the United States, our Founders constitutionally limited our Federal Government's capacity to interfere with religious belief by prohibiting the Congress from passing any law "respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." These constitutional limits have allowed the flourishing of faith across our country, which greatly blesses our land.

George Washington forcefully expressed our collective constitutional promise to protect the rights of people of all faiths, in a historic letter he wrote to the Jewish community at Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island: "the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens...." Today, our cities are home to synagogues, churches, temples, mosques, and other houses of worship that peacefully welcome Americans of every belief. Preserving religious freedom has helped America avoid the wars of religion that have plagued so many cultures throughout history, with deadly consequences.

Today, as America wages war against terror, our resolve to defend religious freedom remains as strong as ever. Many miles from home, American service men and women have risked their lives in our efforts to drive the Taliban regime from power, ending an era of brutal oppression, including religious oppression. At home, Americans demonstrated the vitality of our religious freedom in the enormous outreach by faith communities to help those harmed by the terrorist attacks. In quiet prayers offered to God in churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques and in the helping hands of faith-based groups, Americans have shown a deep love for others and genuine spiritual unity that will sustain us through the difficult days of recovery.

Religious Freedom Day provides us an opportunity to celebrate America's commitment to protect the freedom of religion. On this special day, I encourage all Americans to renew their commitment to protecting the liberties that make our country a beacon of hope for people around the world who seek the free exercise of religious beliefs and other freedoms.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE W. BUSH, 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, 2002, as Religious Freedom Day. I urge all Americans to observe this day by asking for the blessing and protection of Almighty God for our Nation, and to engage in appropriate ceremonies and activities in their homes, schools, and places of worship as a sign of our resolve to protect and preserve our religious freedom.

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

GEORGE W. BUSH

Proclamation 7518 of January 17, 2002

Martin Luther King, Jr., Federal Holiday, 2002

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

For too brief a time, our Nation was blessed by the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King was a modern American hero whose leadership rallied people of all races to rise up against injustice. His commitment to stand peacefully for the conviction that all men are created equal brought about changes in the laws of our Nation, and he paid the ultimate price for the courage he demonstrated in attempting to ensure that all men and women were treated equally in the eyes of the law and by their fellow citizens. It is with a great sense of pride and gratitude that we celebrate this 17th national holiday in honor of Dr. King's life and work. Let us take this opportunity to recall his vision and renew his call for equal justice for all.

We enter this new year and this annual celebration with a revived national spirit. The events of September 11, 2001, have drawn us closer as a Nation and increased our resolve to protect the life and liberty we cherish. And while our patriotism and neighborly affections run high, these circumstances have given us renewed purpose in rededicating ourselves to Dr. King's "dream." As he said on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963: "I have a dream my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by content of their character." Dr. King's words were not just a call to change our laws, but they also served as a challenge to all Americans to change their hearts by refusing to judge people by their skin color or their national origin, by their race or their religion. For while we have made progress, there is much work to be done, both at home and abroad.

In the face of massive injustice, Dr. King's unwavering commitment to nonviolent means of bringing the people of our Nation together provided a foundation for healing and trust. That trust brought us through our recent tragedy as we reached out to each other without regard to race or religion. Dr. King spent his life working for those who held the uncelebrated jobs in our communities—people who simply performed their work with dignity and pride. The words from his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech of 1964, spoken about the workers in the freedom movement, still ring true for those men and women who unselfishly attempted to rescue innocent persons in the World Trade Center buildings and at the Pentagon:

Most of these people will never make the headlines and their names will not appear in Who's Who. Yet when years have rolled past and when the blazing light of truth is focused on this marvelous age in