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Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

BILL OF RIGHTS DAY
HUMAN RIGHTS DAY AND WEEK, 1975

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BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A PROCLAMATION

As the United States of America looks forward to the two hundredth anniversary of our Nation's independence next July, it is appropriate that we pause and reflect on the principles of self-government that underlie our society and continue to nourish it.

Embodied in our great national documents -- the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights -- are the imperishable ideas that all men are created equal, that they are endowed with unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and that it is the people of the United States themselves who have ordained and established the government which serves us all.

The Founding Fathers could not foresee in detail the threats to liberty that might arise as the Republic grew, but they had the wisdom to know that threats would appear and that the people must be protected against them. When the new Constitution was being discussed in 1787, Thomas Jefferson complained in a letter to James Madison of the absence of a Bill of Rights, saying: "Let me add that a bill of rights is what the people are entitled to against every government on earth, general or particular; and what no just government should refuse, or rest on inferences."

Madison became convinced of the need for a Bill of Rights and wrote Jefferson: "The political truths declared in that solemn manner acquire by degrees the character of fundamental maxims of free government, and as they become incorporated with the National sentiment, counteract the impulses of interest and passion." In the First Congress, Madison, the principal proponent of those amendments to the Constitution known as the Bill of Rights, defended them in these words: "If they are incorporated into the constitution, independent tribunals of justice will consider themselves in a peculiar manner the guardians of those rights; they will be an impenetrable bulwark against every assumption of power in the legislative or executive. . . ."

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This has truly been our national experience. So also in the international community have we come to respect and rely on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a fundamental statement of principles reaffirming faith in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

On December 15 we mark the one hundred eighty-fourth anniversary of the adoption of the Bill of Rights and on December 10 we observe the twenty-seventh anniversary of the Universal Declaration. It is fitting that in 1975, which is International Women's Year, we should recognize especially the contributions of women to political and social progress and underline our commitment to remove promptly such barriers that still remain in the way of their full participation in our Nation's life.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GERALD R. FORD, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim December 10, 1975, as Human Rights Day and December 15, 1975, as Bill of Rights Day. I call upon the American people to observe the week beginning December 10, 1975, as Human Rights Week. Further, I urge all Americans during the coming bicentennial year to contemplate the principles of liberty and justice enunciated in the Bill of Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to draw on them as the best means to assure our Nation's continued progress.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this fifth day of November, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred seventy-five, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundredth.

GERALD R. FORD

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