

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Office of the White House Press Secretary

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THE WHITE HOUSE

BILL OF RIGHTS DAY  
HUMAN RIGHTS DAY AND WEEK

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BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A PROCLAMATION

Two hundred years ago, in September 1774, the First Continental Congress assembled in Carpenters' Hall, in Philadelphia, and set in motion a course of human events which created the United States. The system of government begun there, and the high principles on which it rests, continues today as the source of vitality for our society.

Anticipating the bicentennial of this Nation's independence, now is an excellent time to pause and consider the groundwork the delegates to Philadelphia laid for our independence. The First Continental Congress adopted a resolution asserting, among other things, the rights of the American people to life, liberty, and property; to participation in the legislative councils of government; to the heritage of the common law; to trial by jury; and to assembly and petition for redress of grievances. This resolution foreshadowed the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights.

It is altogether fitting to mark the 200th anniversary of this noble beginning of the Continental Congress. Beyond that, it is imperative that all of us study and cherish the ideas and ideals which bore fruit in the great constitutional documents of our country. At the same time, we should take the opportunity, whenever possible, to strengthen the liberties which have been assured us in the Bill of Rights, ratified one hundred and eighty-three years ago this week, on December 15, 1791.

America's concern with human rights is not something that ends at our borders. Benjamin Franklin wrote to a friend in 1789:

"God grant, that not only the Love of Liberty, but a thorough Knowledge of the Rights of Man, may pervade all the Nations of the Earth, so that a Philosopher may set his Foot anywhere on its Surface, and say, 'This is my Country'."

Franklin's spirit of universality has found rich modern expression in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The link between it and our Bill of Rights is clear. On December 10, we celebrate the twenty-sixth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. The General Assembly said that the Universal Declaration stands as "a common standard of achievement for all peoples and

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nations," reminding us that "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world."

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GERALD R. FORD, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim December 10, 1974, as Human Rights Day and December 15, 1974, as Bill of Rights Day. I call upon the people of the United States to observe the week beginning December 10, 1974, as Human Rights Week. Further, I ask all Americans to reflect deeply on the values inherent in the Bill of Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and draw on those values to promote peace, justice, and civility at home and around the world.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this Third day of December, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred seventy-four, and of the Independence of the United States of America the one hundred ninety-ninth.

GERALD R. FORD

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