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Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

BILL OF RIGHTS DAY
HUMAN RIGHTS DAY AND WEEK, 1976

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BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A PROCLAMATION

We Americans have been deeply moved by the sights and sounds of our Bicentennial observance, celebrated this year with pageantry, with fireworks, and with tall ships whose friendly visits have reminded us of our close ties, both contemporary and historical, with many nations around the globe. More importantly, we have given renewed thought to those principles of liberty and justice that underlie our national experience. Reexamined in the light of the past two centuries, the great instruments of our freedom -- the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights -- retain both their vitality and their relevance to today's problems.

When he introduced his proposal for a Bill of Rights to the House of Representatives of the First Congress, James Madison called it "the great work." He said: "It will be a desirable thing to extinguish from the bosom of every member of the community, any apprehensions that there are those among his countrymen who wish to deprive them of the liberty for which they valiantly fought and honorably bled."

Madison argued that "the great object in view is to limit and qualify the powers of Government, by excepting out of the grant of power those cases in which the Government ought not to act, or to act only in a particular mode." Those cases include rights and freedoms all Americans cherish today -- freedom of religion, of speech, of the press; security against unreasonable searches and seizures; freedom from self-incrimination; the guarantee of due process of law; trial by jury.

Our national commitment to the principles of the Bill of Rights is echoed in the community of nations by our respect for the ideals enunciated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. This Declaration eloquently affirms that the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world lies in the recognition of the inherent dignity, and the equal and inalienable rights, of all members of the human family.

In December we pay special tribute to these fundamental documents. December 15 is the one hundred and eighty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Bill of Rights and December 10 is the twenty-eighth anniversary of the Universal Declaration. As we enter the third century of our national

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existence we need more than ever to remember that the principles contained in these fundamental statements of human purpose have immediate application, not only domestically in our dealings with one another, but also internationally in our pursuit of friendly relations with all countries.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GERALD R. FORD, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim December 10, 1976, as Human Rights Day and December 15, 1976, as Bill of Rights Day. I call upon the American people to observe the week beginning December 10, 1976, as Human Rights Week. Further, I ask all Americans, as they reflect with conscious pride on our history, not to be content with past accomplishments but to recognize the future task of our Nation and mankind: to bring about the full realization of the ideals and aspirations expressed in the Bill of Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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

GERALD R. FORD

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