

**Proclamation 6966—Religious Freedom Day, 1997**

January 16, 1997

*By the President of the United States of America*

**A Proclamation**

Every day, in neighborhoods and communities across our Nation, Americans come together to worship and to reaffirm their most deeply held spiritual values. Our right to worship freely—each in our own way—is essential to our well-being. Religious Freedom Day offers us an invaluable opportunity to reflect on this precious human right and to give thanks for its protection in our Nation.

Freedom from religious persecution was of such profound importance to our founders that they placed it first among the freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. History has proved the wisdom of that decision. America's commitment to religious tolerance has empowered us to achieve an atmosphere of understanding, trust, and respect in a society of diverse cultures and religious traditions. And today, much of the world still looks to the United States as the champion of religious liberty.

Yet, even in America, we must be ever vigilant in protecting the freedoms so important to our ancestors and so admired by people throughout the world. The church arsons and the desecration of synagogues and mosques in recent years demonstrated for us all that our country is not entirely free from violence and religious hatred. My Administration took quick and decisive action, including working with the Congress to help churches rebuild and to prevent future incidents. And I am pleased that the American people are coming together as a national community to speak out against such crimes and to renew the climate of trust and tolerance so that all our people can worship without fear.

We must also support the aspirations of ethnic and religious minorities in other nations as they strive for their own right to worship freely. My Administration has established the Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad to provide counsel on how best to prevent persecution and promote reconciliation among people of different faiths.

I invite all nations to join us in supporting individuals in houses of worship around the world as they exercise one of the most sacred of human rights.

**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, 1997, as Religious Freedom Day. I call upon the people of the United States to observe this day with appropriate ceremonies and activities, and I urge them to reaffirm their commitment to the principle of religious freedom.

**In Witness Whereof,** I have hereunto set my hand this sixteenth day of January, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-first.

**William J. Clinton**

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 11:55 a.m., January 17, 1997]

NOTE: This proclamation will be published in the *Federal Register* on January 21.

**Remarks on Presenting the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Former Senator Bob Dole**

January 17, 1997

Thank you very much, General Woerner, for your kind words and for your fine work. I thank you on behalf of all Americans for all the American Battle Monuments Commission does all around the world to ensure that our fallen heroes receive the honor they deserve.

Mr. Vice President, to the members of the Cabinet, Senator and Mrs. Dole and Robin, Majority Leader Lott and many Members of Congress who are here today, to the representatives of the veterans service organizations, the members of the American Battle Monuments Commission, my fellow Americans. Let me begin by thanking Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur, Governor Hugh Carey, Commissioner Wheeler, Dr. Williams, my good friend Jess Hay, and all the members of the American Battle Monu-