

true strength of our country lies in the hearts and souls of a wonderful, fantastic group of people.

It is my honor to be your President. It's my honor to be here in New Orleans. May God bless you all, and may God bless America. Thank you very much. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:23 a.m. on the Nashville Avenue Wharf at the Port of New Orleans. In his remarks, he referred to Gary P. LaGrange, executive director, and Dave A. Wagner, chief operating officer, Port of New Orleans; Francis E. "Hank" Lauricella, chairman, Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans; Gov. M.J. "Mike" Foster of Louisiana; and Mayor Marc H. Morial of New Orleans. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Proclamation 7517—Religious Freedom Day, 2002

January 15, 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

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., January 17, 2002]

NOTE: This proclamation was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 16, and it was published in the *Federal Register* on January 18.

Remarks Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit of Turkey and an Exchange With Reporters

January 16, 2002

President Bush. I'm going to have an opening statement welcoming our friend to the Oval Office. The Prime Minister is going to say a few remarks. Both of us have agreed to take some questions. I would like those traveling with the Turkish press to have a chance to ask some questions today, as well. We'll both take two questions apiece.

Thank you for coming, Mr. Prime Minister. I'm proud to welcome you as a friend. You have been steadfast in your support in the war against terror, and for that, my Nation is very grateful.

We appreciate your leadership when it comes to foreign policy, and we appreciate your leadership when it comes to economic policy. You and your administration have made some very tough decisions, and the economy is improving as a result of your leadership. And we look forward to having a good discussion about how we can increase trade.

And today I'm informing the Prime Minister that we're lifting the travel ban on Turkey so that our citizens can feel comfortable going to that wonderful country to visit and to enjoy the rich history of one of our valued allies and friends. So welcome, Mr. Prime Minister. It's a delight to welcome you, and thank you for coming.

Prime Minister Ecevit. Thank you very much for your kind invitation, Mr. President. It is a great honor for us. We deeply appreciate the support that you have extended, since you have taken over, to relations with Turkey. We had always good relations with the United States in your—during your time of office. And you have totally enhanced this cooperation and friendship.

We have some very good, concrete good news now, as you have referred to it, Mr. President. The State Department has today issued a statement expressing the will of the United States that we will be able to form an economic partnership—

President Bush. Right.

Prime Minister Ecevit. —in addition to our political partnership. We attach great importance to that—our cooperation with you against terrorism is a great service, not only for our own people but for the whole world.

The American determination to get rid of terrorism in the world is of great importance, of historic importance, and we are glad—we are very happy that we have the chance to cooperate with you to that effect. And Turkish and American cooperation, partnership now together with economic partnership will be beneficial for both—peoples of both our countries.

We had very fruitful discussions during the brief period here. We still have other items on our agenda, and we shall go to New York also to visit the place of terrorism. Thank you very much for sharing this time, for showing this generosity and friendship to us.

President Bush. Well, you're welcome, sir.

Prime Minister Ecevit. Thank you.

President Bush. Holland [Steve Holland, Reuters] and then Sonya [Sonya Ross, Associated Press].

Cyprus

Q. Sir, what do both of you see as the chances of a negotiated settlement with Cyprus—

President Bush. I'll let the Prime Minister speak. Of course, we're very encouraged that there is a dialog now taking place. And I want to thank the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister for encouraging that dialog. You can't solve a problem unless the parties are willing to talk.

And Mr. Prime Minister, would you like to speak about the Cyprus situation?

Prime Minister Ecevit. Yes. We attach great importance to our dialog with you with regard to Cyprus. It's good news that the leaders of the two communities are now having face-to-face dialog. They may not attain