

Proclamation 8338—Religious Freedom Day, 2009

January 13, 2009

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Religious freedom is the foundation of a healthy and hopeful society. On Religious Freedom Day, we recognize the importance of the 1786 passage of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom. We also celebrate the first liberties enshrined in our Constitution's Bill of Rights, which guarantee the free exercise of religion for all Americans and prohibit an establishment of religion.

Our Nation was founded by people seeking haven from religious persecution, and the religious liberty they found here remains one of this land's greatest blessings. As Americans, we believe that all people have inherent dignity and worth. Though we may profess different creeds and worship in different manners and places, we respect each other's humanity and expression of faith. People with diverse views can practice their faiths here while living together in peace and harmony, carrying on our Nation's noble tradition of religious freedom.

The United States also stands with religious dissidents and believers from around the globe who practice their faith peacefully. Freedom is not a grant of government or a right for Americans alone; it is the birthright of every man, woman, and child throughout the world. No human freedom is more fundamental than the right to worship in accordance with one's conscience.

Religious Freedom Day is an opportunity to celebrate our legacy of religious liberty, foster a culture of tolerance and peace, and renew commitments to ensure that every person on Earth can enjoy these basic human rights.

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, 2009, as Religious Freedom Day. I call on all Americans to reflect on the great blessing of religious liberty, endeavor to preserve this

freedom for future generations, and commemorate this day with appropriate events and activities.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this thirteenth day of January, in the year of our Lord two thousand nine, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-third.

George W. Bush

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NOTE: This proclamation was published in the *Federal Register* on January 15.

Remarks on Presenting the Presidential Medal of Freedom at the Department of State

January 15, 2009

Thank you all. I got 5 days left; be seated. [Laughter]

Madam Secretary, thank you very much for your kind introduction, and thank you for these beautiful reminders of how fantastic it's been to work with you.

By the way, these are going to be at Southern Methodist University—[laughter]—proudly displayed at the Presidential Center I will build to remind our country of the timeless values of freedom and liberty. And I am honored to take them back to Texas. I'm honored to take my wife back to Texas too. [Laughter]

The award you gave Laura, Condi, is well deserved in my unobjective opinion. She has been awesome First Lady. And I'm proud to have been here in Washington. And you've been an awesome friend and a great Secretary of State.

You know, people—I tell people all the time, they ask me about Condi, and I say, "She's like my sister." We've been through a lot together. [Laughter] And one of the things about her is that she has never lost her great optimism. She's plenty tough when she needed to be tough; she's plenty charming when she needs to be charming. But during the darkest of days, she always had a sense of optimism and constantly reminded me of what is possible and what will happen if we don't lose confidence in fundamental