
Presidential Documents

Title 3—

Proclamation 7012 of July 18, 1997

The President

Captive Nations Week, 1997

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

From its earliest days as a Nation, America has been a champion of freedom and human dignity. Our Declaration of Independence was a ringing cry against “the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these States” and affirmed the revolutionary concept that governments derive their powers from the free consent of those they govern. For more than two centuries our Bill of Rights has guaranteed such basic human rights as freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom from arbitrary arrest. With such a history and heritage, we can feel only outrage that millions of people around the world still suffer beneath the shadow of oppression, their rights routinely violated by their own governments and leaders.

Almost four decades ago, our Nation observed the first Captive Nations Week to express formally our solidarity with the oppressed peoples of the world. Since that time, thanks to our steadfast advocacy for democratic reform and universal human rights, and the courage and determination of countless men and women around the globe, the world’s political landscape has undergone a remarkable transformation. Nations once dominated by the Soviet Union and its satellite governments have blossomed into new democracies, establishing free market economies and free societies that respect individual rights. Families and countrymen once divided by walls and barbed wire, now walk together in the fresh air of liberty. The unprecedented gathering of 44 countries at the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council meeting earlier this month in Madrid symbolizes how far we have come in building a stable, democratic, and undivided Europe.

Yet while countries like Poland, Romania, and Estonia are no longer among the ranks of captive nations, too many others are still held hostage by tyranny, and new nations still fall victim to the scourge of oppression. Tragically, even as the wave of freedom and democratic reform sweeps across Eastern and Central Europe, former Soviet bloc countries, and nations in South America, Asia, and Africa, there are still governments that derive their strength, not from the consent of their citizens, but from terror, repression, and exploitation. Too many leaders still fuel the fires of racial, ethnic, and religious hatred; too many people still suffer from ignorance, prejudice, and brutality.

As we observe Captive Nations Week this year, let us reaffirm our commitment to the American ideals of freedom and justice. Let us strengthen our resolve to promote respect for human rights and self-determination for women and men of every nationality, creed, and race. Let us continue to speak out for those who have no voice. It is our Nation’s obligation to do so, as the world’s best hope for lasting peace and freedom and as a source of enduring inspiration to oppressed peoples everywhere.

The Congress, by Joint Resolution approved July 17, 1959 (73 Stat. 212), has authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation designating the third week in July of each year as “Captive Nations Week.”

NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim July 20 through July 26, 1997, as Captive Nations Week. I call upon the people of the United States to observe this week with appropriate ceremonies and activities and to rededicate ourselves to supporting the cause of human rights, liberty, peace, and self-determination for all the peoples of the world.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this eighteenth day of July, 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-second.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "William J. Clinton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "W" and "C".

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