

Proclamation 7012—Captive Nations Week, 1997

July 18, 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.

William J. Clinton

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The President's Radio Address

July 19, 1997

Good morning. Today I want to talk about the important progress we're making in our efforts to get guns out of the hands of violent juveniles.

Our administration has put in place a tough, smart anticrime strategy, relying on more community police, stricter punishment, and better afterschool prevention efforts. This strategy is working. For 5 years in a row, we've seen serious crime drop nationwide. Last year, we saw the largest one-year decline in violent crime and murder in 35 years. Our most recent figures even show a slight decline in juvenile crime. But we all know that juvenile crime and violence are still significant problems in our country. We know that children are still killing children for shoes, for jackets, for turf. We know that too many of our young people are drawn to guns and violence as a way of life.

One fact stands out and demands our attention. Over the past decades, the number of gun murders by juveniles has skyrocketed by 300 percent. This is simply unacceptable. We know we must break this deadly trend. Some of our cities are beginning to do it. In Boston, thanks to a comprehensive effort by prosecutors, police, probation officers, community leaders, and ordinary citizens, not a single juvenile murder has been committed with a gun in 2 full years. Boston police commissioner Paul Evans should be commended for his leadership role in this outstanding effort, and I'm very glad that he's joined me here today.

A year ago, I looked at Boston's approach, and it was clear that tracing guns seized from young criminals was a key to the city's success. So I directed the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms to launch a national initiative in 17 cities to replicate Boston's effort and trace all the guns used in crimes. A year later, the first results are in. Police departments in these 17 cities submitted for tracing nearly twice as many guns used in crimes as they did the year before. We found that almost half of all guns used in crimes came from young people. More importantly, for the first time, we know where the juveniles are getting these guns, how they are

getting them, and what kinds of guns they are using.

One crucial fact is now clear, that guns are finding their way quickly from legitimate retail stores to black markets through a network of gun traffickers and corrupt gun dealers. Make no mistake: Gun traffickers are funneling guns to lawless youth. We know how they operate, and we intend to shut them down.

In Milwaukee, thanks to our youth gun-tracing initiative, police officers were able to find a pattern. Several guns used in drive-by shootings and armed robberies had originally been purchased by one man, a security guard named Larry Shikes. Police investigators quickly discovered that Shikes was selling brand new semiautomatic weapons from the trunk of his car. Police swept in and arrested him in April. He pled guilty to trafficking charges, and he will be sentenced next month.

Our youth gun-tracing initiative has been so effective that I'm pleased to announce we will expand our efforts to 10 more cities, including Philadelphia and Los Angeles. I want to thank the ATF and all the people who have worked on this initiative, especially Under Secretary of Treasury Ray Kelly, who is also with me today. We will work with Congress to hire more ATF agents to work with local police officers and prosecutors to pursue traffickers based on the leads we're generating now every day.

We also have a chance to build on our progress by passing a smart, tough juvenile justice bill that cracks down on guns and gangs. We need to provide for more prosecutors, tougher penalties, and better afterschool gang prevention programs. We should require that every new gun sold in America has a child safety lock. And we should prohibit violent teenagers from buying guns once they become adults.

Last week, I was disappointed that a Senate committee considering a juvenile crime bill voted against requiring Federal firearms dealers to provide child safety locks. I urge the full Senate to reconsider this action.

A juvenile crime bill must be comprehensive. Of course, it must get tough on violent juvenile offenders, but it also must cut off their access to guns. That's one big reason