



## Baltic Freedom Day, 1989

*By the President of the United States of America*

### **A Proclamation**

Fifty years ago on August 23, 1939, the foreign ministers of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany signed the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. The secret protocols to this treaty condemned the independent Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to the foreign domination they still endure today.

Less than 1 year after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, the Soviet Union invaded the three Baltic Republics and imposed a regime antithetical to the ideas of national sovereignty and individual liberty. The suffering of the Baltic people was exacerbated when Nazi forces drove through these states during the beginning of the Nazi-Soviet War and established a brutal administration. When the Red Army recaptured the Baltic States during World War II, it reinstated a reign of terror under the Soviet secret police. Hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women, and children were deported to Siberia; thousands of others perished in armed resistance to the attack upon their national independence and individual rights. By the end of World War II, the Baltic States had lost 20 percent of their population.

Since their forcible annexation by the Soviet Union in 1940, the people of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia have suffered political oppression, religious persecution, and repression of their national consciousness. Their cultural heritage has been denigrated and suppressed, and russification has threatened their survival as distinct ethnic groups. An aggressive program of industrialization has posed hazards to their health as well as the environment. Members of the clergy and lay religious leaders have been systematically harassed and imprisoned for activities deemed unacceptable by the authorities.

However, half a century of repression has not broken the spirit of the Baltic peoples. Today, their longing and hopes for liberty remain strong. Hundreds of thousands of Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian men and women have publicly demonstrated their desire for freedom and democracy, calling for national autonomy and control over their own affairs.

The future looks brighter today than at any other time in the Baltic States' post-war experience. The undeniable voice of Baltic people is being heard. Some religious shrines—desecrated by the Communist government and used to house concerts, artwork, and even a museum of atheism—have been returned to the churches. Members of the clergy have been allowed to take up their pastoral duties. The unique languages, national flags, and patriotic songs of the three countries have been restored. Some political prisoners have been released.

These are important steps, but justice demands that more be taken. Recent improvements in human rights practices by the ruling Communist officials are not complete, nor have they been institutionalized. The people of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia both demand and deserve lasting guarantees of their fundamental rights.

The Government of the United States does not and will not recognize the unilateral incorporation by force of arms of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union. Of this observance of Baltic Freedom Day, we express our solidarity with them and call upon the Soviet Union to listen to their calls for freedom and self-determination.

By Senate Joint Resolution 63, the Congress has designated June 14, 1989, as "Baltic Freedom Day" and has requested the President to issue a proclamation in observance of this event.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE BUSH, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim June 14, 1989, as Baltic Freedom Day. I call upon the people of the United States to observe this day with appropriate remembrances and ceremonies and to reaffirm their commitment to principles of liberty and freedom for all oppressed people.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this fourteenth day of June, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-nine, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirteenth.

*George Bush*