

Statement on the Anniversary of the Berlin Wall

August 12, 1989

Twenty-eight years ago, a barrier of steel and stone was erected in the heart of Berlin. It stands there still -- now more than ever a relic of a bygone era and a failed philosophy. The barbed wire that severed a great city also proclaimed in stark, inhuman terms the unnatural division of Europe. Beyond its tragic human cost over the years, rending families and friends, the Berlin Wall has affronted the free world with an alien vision of closed societies where basic freedoms are denied.

The courageous people of West Berlin tend the precious fire of freedom as an example for us all. The city prospers and benefits from their innovative spirit and from expanding international ties. Its cultural diversity, economic vigor, and political pluralism are the fruits of boundless imagination at work in a democratic community. The United States is proud to have contributed to Berlin's freedom and vitality. We remain firm in our commitment to assure the city's security and well-being. In a year which marks the 40th anniversary of the airlift, such historic bonds between Americans and Berliners carry special meaning.

The United States is also committed to improving the lives of Berliners and to bringing closer the day when the city is again united. Together with our British and French allies, we have put forward an initiative to make such progress a reality. We want Berlin to enjoy greater access to the world through expanded air links, to be a center of international meetings and sports events, and to foster more human contacts which lead to better understanding. As I said in Mainz on May 31, we want Berlin to be a place of cooperation, not a point of confrontation. We have asked the Soviet Union, as part of its four-power responsibilities for Berlin, to join us in achieving these goals. We still await what we hope will be a positive response.

We observe this sad anniversary with renewed determination to overcome the division of Berlin and of Europe. On behalf of the people of the United States, I reaffirm this nation's commitment to Berlin's freedom and prosperity. The tide of history has turned, and we look to a future Europe whole and free. As we now mark the day the wall was built, so shall we inevitably celebrate a day when it no longer divides Berlin, the German people, and the nations of Europe.