

Voice of America ~ From Sea to Shining Sea

A Declaration of the People of the United States of America

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. -- We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. -- That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, -- that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind is more disposed to suffer than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new guards for their future Security. -- Such has been the patient suffering of We the People; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former System of Government. The history of the present Government is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over the People. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world: -- They have refused to Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good. -- They have forbidden States to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless Suspended in their operation till Federal Assent should be obtained; and when so Suspended, they have utterly neglected to attend to them. -- They have passed Laws for the Security of the people, that the people should relinquish their rights for the sake of that Security; this inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only. -- They have created a system of forms, regulations, and requirements for the sole purpose of fatiguing the people into compliance with their measures. -- They have used the Representative Houses repeatedly for their invasions on the rights of the people. -- They have refused to act for good of the people for a long time, whereby the Legislative Powers, incapable of action, have abandoned the needs of the People and the States remaining in the meantime exposed to all the economic dangers from without, and convulsions within. -- They have endeavored to obstruct the Laws for the common good; refusing to pass others for the same, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands and to deny us our God given rights. -- They have obstructed the administration of justice, through the complicity of the Judiciary Powers. -- They have made judges dependent on their Political Leanings, for the appointment to their offices. -- They have erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass the People, and eat out their Substance. -- They have affected to render the military independent of and superior to the civil power. -- They have combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving their Assent to Acts of pretended Legislation. -- For quartering large bodies of armed troops in other countries. -- For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from Punishment for any Atrocities which they should commit on the Inhabitants of those Countries. -- For undermining fair Trade with all parts of the world. -- For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent. -- For depriving us in some cases, of the benefits of Trial by jury. -- For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences. -- For abolishing the free System of Laws in neighboring Countries, establishing therein Arbitrary governments, and enlarging their influence so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule throughout the World. -- For taking away our rights, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Form of our Government. -- For declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever. -- They wage War against enemies of their own creation and have Abdicated our Rights here declaring us in need of Security for the duration of an undeclared wars against unseen and unknown foes. -- They have caused the plundering of our seas, ravaged our coasts, polluted our land and water, and destroyed the lives of our people with both their actions and lack of action. -- They have at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy of a Government of a civilized nation. -- They constrained our fellow citizens (our sons and daughters) to become the Executioners of citizens of other countries without justification or just cause, relying instead on False Accusations and assumptions designed to Mislead and inflame the passions of the People to further their cause. -- They have excited Insurrections, and have endeavored to Force or coerce the inhabitants of other Countries to accept our way of life as their own; whose known recourse to fight against our modern form of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions. -- In every stage of these oppressions we have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Government, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to govern a free people. -- Nor have we been wanting in attentions to our Government. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common bonds to disavow these usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

We, therefore, the People of the United States of America appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the name, and by authority of the good People of this country, solemnly publish and declare, that these United States are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the Federal Government, and that all political connection between them and the Federal Government, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which independent states may of right do. -- And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our Sacred Honor.



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A large, elegant handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John Hancock". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent, sweeping flourish at the end.