



IN DEFENSE OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

WHEREAS, the right to religious freedom is based upon the inherent dignity of the human person, which is known through both reason and divine revelation; and

WHEREAS, the right to religious freedom is guaranteed by the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other documents recognizing religious freedom; and

WHEREAS, religious freedom means that all persons are to be free from coercion in matters of belief and conscience, and that no person should be forced to act in a manner contrary to his or her own beliefs or conscience; and

WHEREAS, the Church consistently teaches that religious freedom is an inalienable right which should be recognized in the governing laws of each country in such a way that it is acknowledged as a basic civil right; and

WHEREAS, religious freedom is not a benefit that a government confers out of a sense of mere tolerance, which can be removed, but rather it is an inalienable right, rooted in the transcendent dignity of every human being; and

WHEREAS, Pope Francis has called religious freedom, “a fundamental right of man,” that is “not simply freedom of thought or private worship,” but “the freedom to live according to ethical principles, both privately and publicly, consequent to the truth one has found;” and

WHEREAS, religious freedom is at the very heart of human rights because it encompasses freedom of speech, assembly and conscience, which together form the basis of civil society and respect for the individual; and

WHEREAS, the Knights of Columbus since its founding has worked to defend religious freedom for Catholics and all people, and has done so out of our commitment to our faith and our unshakeable belief that religious freedom is a basic civil right; and

WHEREAS, this work on behalf of religious freedom includes efforts in the U.S. Supreme Court case *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, which affirmed the right of children to a Catholic education, activities to protest the persecution of Catholics in Mexico in the 1920s, efforts to combat the anti-religious worldview of Communism, and the inclusion of the phrase “under God” in the U.S. Pledge of Allegiance to distinguish the United States from anti-religious governments; and

WHEREAS, on June 28, 2013, the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) proposed a rule pursuant to the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act that requires most employers to provide, and all Americans to subsidize, health insurance plans that provide full coverage for surgical sterilizations and contraception, including abortifacients such as “morning after” pills; and

WHEREAS, on July 10, 2015, HHS finalized these rules, requiring certain religious entities and closely held for-profit businesses with moral or religious objections to fill out a form or write a letter certifying to the government their objection, which sets into motion the process of providing these services, thereby implicating the objecting entity in providing sterilizations, contraception, and abortifacient drugs; and

WHEREAS, the HHS mandate seeks to force private Catholic employers and businesses—such as the Knights of Columbus—to provide all employees with insurance coverage that includes abortion-inducing drugs, contraception, and sterilization; and

WHEREAS, the numerous threats to religious liberty that have appeared in recent years are among the most serious intrusions on religious liberty we have seen in our lifetimes; and

WHEREAS, in light of the continued effort to redefine marriage, including the Supreme Court’s June 26, 2015 ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the First Amendment rights of Catholic individuals and institutions are increasingly threatened; and

WHEREAS, the First Amendment Defense Act would protect the free exercise of religious beliefs and moral convictions of persons by preventing the federal government from taking discriminatory action against such persons in the areas of government contracts, benefits, tax treatment, accreditations and licensures.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that as citizens and as Knights of Columbus, we will remain steadfast in our support for the free exercise of religion as it is enshrined in the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other documents recognizing religious freedom; and

FURTHER RESOLVED, that we stand firm in our conviction that the full guarantee of religious liberty cannot be limited to “freedom of worship” as some have attempted, but must include full “freedom of religion,” which necessarily encompasses the public dimension of religion, the freedom from persecution or discrimination on the basis of conscience and belief, and the fact that believers are called to play an active role in building the social order; and

FURTHER RESOLVED, that we stand in solidarity with our bishops in their call to the Catholic faithful, and to all Americans, to join together to oppose the HHS mandate and to protect religious liberty and freedom of conscience; and

FURTHER RESOLVED, that we call upon the Obama Administration to rescind the HHS mandate which is a clear and direct violation of our religious liberty rights; and

FURTHER RESOLVED, that we call on Congress to pass the First Amendment Defense Act, a measure that is essential to protecting the free exercise of religion in light of heightened threats to religious freedom; and

FURTHER RESOLVED, that we call upon all government officials in all of the countries where we are active to enact similar legislation that will protect the right of religious institutions and individuals to be free from government coercion in all matters; and

FURTHER RESOLVED, that we will remain steadfast in our opposition to future governmental actions or policies that force institutions and individuals to violate their most deeply held moral and religious convictions; and

FURTHER RESOLVED, that our struggle for religious freedom at this decisive moment in our history is not only for our sake, but for the sake of our children, our grandchildren and all future generations, so that they too may know a country that is “one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”