DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF MAN AND OF THE CITIZEN

By Miscellaneous

Approved by the National Assembly of France, August 26, 1789

The representatives of the French people, organized as a National

Assembly, believing that the ignorance, neglect, or contempt of

the rights of man are the sole cause of public calamities and of

the corruption of governments, have determined to set forth in a

solemn declaration the natural, unalienable, and sacred rights of

man, in order that this declaration, being constantly before all

the members of the Social body, shall remind them continually of

their rights and duties; in order that the acts of the legislative

power, as well as those of the executive power, may be compared

at any moment with the objects and purposes of all political

institutions and may thus be more respected, and, lastly, in order

that the grievances of the citizens, based hereafter upon simple

and incontestable principles, shall tend to the maintenance of

the constitution and redound to the happiness of all. Therefore

the National Assembly recognizes and proclaims, in the presence

and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following rights

of man and of the citizen:

Articles:

1 Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social

distinctions may be founded only upon the general good.

2 The aim of all political association is the preservation of

the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights

are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.

3. The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the

nation. No body nor individual may exercise any authority which

does not proceed directly from the nation.

4. Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which

injures no one else; hence the exercise of the natural rights

of each man has no limits except those which assure to the other

members of the society the enjoyment of the same rights. These

limits can only be determined by law.

5. Law can only prohibit such actions as are hurtful to society.

Nothing may be prevented which is not forbidden by law, and no

one may be forced to do anything not provided for by law.

6. Law is the expression of the general will. Every citizen has

a right to participate personally, or through his representative,

in its foundation. It must be the same for all, whether it

protects or punishes. All citizens, being equal in the eyes of

the law, are equally eligible to all dignities and to all public

positions and occupations, according to their abilities, and

without distinction except that of their virtues and talents.

7. No person shall be accused, arrested, or imprisoned except in

the cases and according to the forms prescribed by law. Any one

soliciting, transmitting, executing, or causing to be executed,

any arbitrary order, shall be punished. But any citizen summoned

or arrested in virtue of the law shall submit without delay, as

resistance constitutes an offense.

8. The law shall provide for such punishments only as are

strictly and obviously necessary, and no one shall suffer

punishment except it be legally inflicted in virtue of a law

passed and promulgated before the commission of the offense.

9. As all persons are held innocent until they shall have been

declared guilty, if arrest shall be deemed indispensable, all

harshness not essential to the securing of the prisoner's

person shall be severely repressed by law.

10. No one shall be disquieted on account of his opinions,

including his religious views, provided their manifestation does

not disturb the public order established by law.

11. The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the

most precious of the rights of man. Every citizen may,

accordingly, speak, write, and print with freedom, but shall

be responsible for such abuses of this freedom as shall be

defined by law.

12. The security of the rights of man and of the citizen

requires public military forces. These forces are, therefore,

established for the good of all and not for the personal

advantage of those to whom they shall be intrusted.

13. A common contribution is essential for the maintenance

of the public forces and for the cost of administration. This

should be equitably distributed among all the citizens in

proportion to their means.

14. All the citizens have a right to decide, either personally

or by their representatives, as to the necessity of the public

contribution; to grant this freely; to know to what uses it is

put; and to fix the proportion, the mode of assessment and of

collection and the duration of the taxes.

15. Society has the right to require of every public agent an

account of his administration.

16. A society in which the observance of the law is not assured,

nor the separation of powers defined, has no constitution at all.

17. Since property is an inviolable and sacred right, no one

shall be deprived thereof except where public necessity, legally

determined, shall clearly demand it, and then only on condition

that the owner shall have been previously and equitably indemnified.

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The above document was written by The Marquis de Lafayette,

with help from his friend and neighbor, American envoy to France,

Thomas Jefferson. Lafayette, you may recall, had come to the

Colonies at age 19, been commissioned a Major General, and was

instrumental in the defeat of the British during the American

Revolutionary War. He considered one special man his 'father':

George Washington.

French King Louis XVI signed this document, under duress, but

never intended to support it. Indeed, the Revolution in France

soon followed, leading to the tyrannical rule of Napolean

Bonaparte.

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