

General Secretary Gorbachev's Address

Dear Americans:

I see a good augury in the way we are beginning the New Year, which has been declared the Year of Peace. We are starting it with an exchange of direct messages, President Reagan's to the Soviet people and mine to you. This, I believe, is a hopeful sign of change which, though small, is nonetheless a change for the better in our relations. The few minutes that I will be speaking to you strike me as a meaningful symbol of our mutual willingness to go on moving toward each other, which is what your President and I began doing at Geneva. For a discussion along those lines, we had the mandate of our peoples. They want the constructive Soviet-American dialog to continue uninterrupted and to yield tangible results.

As I face you today, I want to say that Soviet people are dedicated to peace, that supreme value equal to the gift of life. We cherish the idea of peace, having suffered for it. Together with the pain of unhealing wounds and the agony of irretrievable losses, it has become part and parcel of our flesh and blood. In our country there is not a single family or a single home that has not kept alive the memory of their kith and kin who perished in the flames of war, the war in which the Soviet and American peoples were allies and fought side by side.

I say this because our common quest for peace has its roots in the past, and that means we have a historic record of cooperation which can today inspire our joint efforts for the sake of the future. The many letters I have received from you and my conversations with your fellow countrymen -- Senators, Congressmen, scientists, businessmen, and statesmen -- have convinced me that in the United States, too, people realize that our two nations should never be at war, that a collision between them would be the greatest of tragedies.

It is a reality of today's world that it is senseless to seek greater security for oneself through new types of weapons. At present, every new step in the arms race increases the danger and the risk for both sides and for all humankind. It is the forceful and compelling demand of life itself that we should follow the path of cutting back nuclear arsenals and keeping outer space peaceful. This is what we are negotiating about at Geneva, and we would very much like those talks to be successful this year.

In our efforts for peace, we should be guided by an awareness of the fact that today history has willed our two nations to bear an enormous responsibility to the peoples of our two countries and, indeed, the peoples of all countries for preserving life on Earth. Our duty to all human kind is to offer it a safe prospect of peace, a prospect of entering the third millenium without fear. Let us commit ourselves to doing away with the threat hanging over humanity. Let us not shift that task onto our children's shoulders.

We can hardly succeed in attaining that goal unless we begin saving up, bit by bit, the most precious capital there is: trust among nations and peoples. And it is absolutely essential to start mending the existing deficit of trust in Soviet-American relations. I believe that one of the main results of my meeting with President Reagan is that, as leaders and as human beings, we were able to take the first step towards overcoming mistrust and to activate the factor of confidence. The gap dividing us is still wide, to bridge it will not be easy, but we saw in Geneva that it can be done. Bridging that gap would be a great feat, a feat our people are ready to perform for the sake of world peace.

I am reminded of the title of a remarkable work of American literature, the novel ``The Winter of Our Discontent.'' In that phrase let me just substitute hope for discontent. And may not only this winter but every season of this year and of the years to come be full of hope for a better future, a hope that, together, we can turn into reality. I can assure you that we shall spare no effort in working for that. For the Soviet people, the year 1986 marks the beginning of a new stage in carrying out our constructive plans. Those are peaceful plans. We have made them known to the whole world.

I wish you a happy New Year. To every American family I wish good health, peace, and happiness.

Note: The President's remarks were recorded at 9:18 a.m. on December 28 in the Cypress Room at the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles, CA, for television broadcast in the Soviet Union at 1 p.m. on January 1. As printed here, General Secretary Gorbachev's address, which was televised simultaneously in the United States, follows the unofficial Soviet translation contained in the White House press release.

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/10186a.htm>