

The United States got a new president this week

President Barack Obama quickly got to work in his first days in office. In one of his first official actions, he ordered the closure of the American detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, within a year. He also ordered a study of military trials of suspected terrorists. And, he banned the most severe methods of questioning suspects.

The orders came just two days after Mister Obama was sworn-in as president in front of the largest crowd ever in Washington, D.C. Media reports say up to one million eight hundred thousand people attended the presidential inauguration Tuesday. Before then, the largest crowd ever in Washington was one million two hundred thousand people. That happened at the inauguration of President Lyndon Johnson in nineteen sixty-five.

The crowd this week represented a mix of Americans - people of different races and religions, older adults and young people. They filled the long grassy area from the steps of the United States Capitol building to the Lincoln Memorial. Centuries ago, the Capitol was built partly by slaves. The memorial is where the civil rights leader Martin Luther King Junior gave his "I Have a Dream" speech.

Standing in front of the Capitol, Barack Obama became the first African-American president of the United States. Mister Obama is taking command of a nation at war and an economy in crisis. In his inaugural speech, he promised to begin again what he called, the work of remaking America.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA: "What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility – a recognition on the part of every American, that we have duties to ourselves, our nation and the world, duties that we do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character, than giving our all to a difficult task."

The new president also had a message for the world. He spoke of America's desire for peace, and to seek the common good.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA: "To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict, or blame their society's ills on the West – know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy. To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history, but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist." President Obama also said he plans to take American foreign policy in a new direction.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA: "Know that America is a friend of each nation and every man, woman and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity, and we are ready to lead once more." After his swearing-in, the president joined members of Congress for a luncheon in the Capitol. He then made his way to the White House as part of a traditional inaugural parade.

The events of the day were followed by celebrations at ten official balls throughout Washington. President Obama and his wife Michelle attended each one. The next morning, prayers were offered for the new president at the National Cathedral. Then, almost two years since announcing his candidacy for America's highest office, Mister Obama began the work of president.