

106TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. RES. 303

Expressing the sense of the Senate regarding the treatment by the Russian Federation of Andrei Babitsky, a Russian journalist working for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 4, 2000

Mr. KENNEDY (for himself, Mr. LEAHY, Mr. GRAMS, and Mr. VOINOVICH) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

JUNE 14, 2000

Reported by Mr. HELMS, with an amendment

[Strike out all after the resolving clause and insert the part printed in italic]

JUNE 23, 2000

Considered, amended, and agreed to

RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of the Senate regarding the treatment by the Russian Federation of Andrei Babitsky, a Russian journalist working for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

Whereas Andrei Babitsky, an accomplished Russian journalist working for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, a United States Government-funded broadcasting service, faces serious charges in Russia after being held captive and beaten by Russian authorities;

Whereas the mission of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's bureaus in Russia is to provide Russian listeners objective and uncensored reporting on developments in Russia and around the world;

Whereas Russian authorities repeatedly denounced Mr. Babitsky for his reporting on the war in Chechnya, including his documentation of Russian troop casualties and the Russian Federation's brutal treatment of Chechen civilians;

Whereas Senate Resolutions 223 and 262 of the One Hundred Sixth Congress condemning the violence in Chechnya and urging a peaceful resolution to the conflict were adopted by the Senate by unanimous consent on November 19, 1999, and February 24, 2000, respectively;

Whereas on January 16, Mr. Babitsky was arrested by Russian police in the Chechen battle zone, was accused of assisting the Chechen forces, and was told he was to stand trial in Moscow;

Whereas Russian authorities took Mr. Babitsky to a "filtration camp" for suspected Chechen collaborators where he was severely beaten and then transferred to an undisclosed location;

Whereas on February 3, the Government of the Russian Federation announced that it had traded Mr. Babitsky to Chechen units in exchange for Russian prisoners, a violation of the Geneva Conventions to which Russia is a party;

Whereas on February 25, Mr. Babitsky was released by his captors in the Republic of Dagestan, only to be jailed by Russian officials for carrying false identity papers;

Whereas Mr. Babitsky says the papers were forced on him by his captors and used to smuggle him across borders;

Whereas Mr. Babitsky now faces charges from the Government of the Russian Federation of collaborating with the Chechens and carrying false identity papers and is not allowed to leave the city of Moscow;

Whereas on February 25, a senior advisor in Russia's Foreign Ministry published an article in The Moscow Times entitled "Should Liberty Leave?", which condemned the coverage by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty of the war in Chechnya, particularly reporting by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty correspondent Andrei Babitsky, and which stated that it would "be better to close down the branches of Radio Liberty on Russian territory";

Whereas on March 13, the Russian Ministry of the Press ordered Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Moscow Bureau to provide complete recordings of broadcasts between February 15 and March 15, an action that Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty described as "designed to intimidate us and others";

Whereas on March 14, the Russian Ministry of the Press issued a directive to prevent the broadcast of interviews from Chechen resistance leaders, an act of censorship which undercuts the ability of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty to fulfill its responsibilities as an objective news organization;

Whereas the treatment of Mr. Babitsky intimidates other correspondents working in Russia, particularly those covering the tragic story unfolding in Chechnya;

Whereas Russia's evolution into a stable democracy requires a free and vibrant press; and

Whereas it is imperative that the United States Government respond vigorously to the harassment and intimidation of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty: Now, therefore, be it *Resolved*, That the Senate—

(1) urges the Government of the Russian Federation to drop its charges against Mr. Babitsky;

(2) calls upon the Government of the Russian Federation to provide a full accounting of Mr. Babitsky's detention;

(3) condemns the Russian Federation's harassment and intimidation of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and other news organizations;

(4) calls upon the Government of the Russian Federation to adhere fully to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which declares in Article 19 that "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers"; and

(5) urges the Government of the Russian Federation and the President of the United States to imple-

ment the recommendations in Senate Resolutions 223 and 262 of the One Hundred Sixth Congress.

