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H. RES. 629

Condemning violence by the Government of Syria against journalists, and expressing the sense of the House of Representatives on freedom of the press in Syria.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 19, 2012

Mr. SCHIFF (for himself, Mr. PENCE, Mr. WOLF, and Mr. BERMAN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

RESOLUTION

Condemning violence by the Government of Syria against journalists, and expressing the sense of the House of Representatives on freedom of the press in Syria.

Whereas United Nations Security Council Resolution 1738 (2006) stresses the obligations of states under international norms to ensure the safety of journalists in war zones;

Whereas, since the uprisings in Syria began in January 2011, the Government of Syria has denied entry to foreign journalists and arrested, abducted, beaten, tortured, and killed journalists, photographers, and bloggers to prevent the free flow of accurate information to the outside world;

Whereas restrictions imposed by the Government of Syria on media have made it extraordinarily difficult to verify death tolls and the exact nature and course of events within the country;

Whereas Syrian state media reports differ significantly from the few independent reports that make their way out of Syria;

Whereas Reporters Without Borders, an international non-governmental organization that advocates freedom of the press and freedom of information, has listed Bashar al-Assad as a Predator of Freedom of the Press;

Whereas the League of Arab States called for the media to be allowed into Syria during its monitoring mission that was suspended indefinitely on January 28, 2012, due to the “critical deterioration of the situation” in Syria;

Whereas freelance journalist Ferzat Jarban was tortured and killed on November 19 or 20, 2011, after filming protests in Al-Qassir, Syria;

Whereas videographer Basil al-Sayed died on December 27, 2011, from a gunshot wound he suffered 5 days earlier at a checkpoint in the Baba Amr neighborhood in the city of Homs, Syria;

Whereas Shukri Abu al-Burghul of the state-owned daily Al Thawra and Radio Damascus died on January 3, 2012, in Damascus, Syria from a gunshot wound to the head he suffered four days earlier;

Whereas Gilles Jacquier, a correspondent with France 2 television, was killed in a grenade explosion on January 11, 2012, while covering demonstrations in the city of Homs;

Whereas freelance journalist Mazhar Tayyara, a videographer and photojournalist who contributed to Agence France-

Presse and other international outlets, was killed by government forces' fire in the city of Homs on February 4, 2012;

Whereas New York Times correspondent Anthony Shadid died of an asthma attack on February 16, 2012, while attempting to leave Syria after reporting inside the country for a week, gathering information on the Free Syrian Army and other armed elements of the resistance to the government of President Bashar al-Assad;

Whereas freelance journalist Rami al-Sayed, who filmed videos of Syrian security forces' repressive acts, was killed on February 21, 2012, while covering the bombardment of the city of Homs by Government of Syria forces;

Whereas journalist Marie Colvin of the Sunday Times, a United States citizen, and freelance photojournalist Remi Ochlik were killed on February 22, 2012, after their makeshift press center in Homs was struck by rockets fired by Government of Syria forces;

Whereas, on February 22, 2012, Department of State Spokesman Mark Toner stated, “[T]oday, we’re also clearly deeply troubled and saddened by reports that American journalist Marie Colvin and French journalist Remi Ochlik were killed today in Homs as a result of the intense shelling, the ongoing intense shelling by the Syrian regime. . . . We, of course, extend our deepest condolences to their families and loved ones and just note that their sacrifice in chronicling the daily suffering of the people of Homs stands as a testament to journalism’s highest standards.”;

Whereas 13 opposition activists in Syria were killed during a weeklong attempt to rescue 4 foreign journalists, 2 of

whom were injured, who were trapped in Homs as a result of the bombardment by the Government of Syria that killed Marie Colvin and Remi Ochlik;

Whereas videographer Anas al-Tarsha, who documented unrest in the besieged city of Homs, was killed by a mortar round while filming the bombardment of the city's Qarabees district on February 24, 2012;

Whereas, from 1992 through 2010, zero journalists were killed in Syria according to the Committee to Protect Journalists; and

Whereas the Government of Syria has continued to arbitrarily arrest and detain prominent Syrian journalists and bloggers: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

2 (1) calls on the Government of Syria to immediately open the country up to independent and foreign journalists and immediately end its media
3 blackout;

4 (2) condemns in the strongest possible terms
5 the Government of Syria's abuse, intimidation, and
6 violence towards journalists, videographers, and
7 bloggers;

8 (3) calls on the Government of Syria to immediately release all journalists, videographers, and
9 bloggers who have been detained, arrested, or imprisoned;

10 (4) pays tribute to the journalists who have lost
11 their lives while reporting on the conflict in Syria;

1 (5) commends the bravery and courage of jour-
2 nalists who continue to operate in harm's way;

3 (6) supports the people of Syria seeking access
4 to a free flow of accurate news and other forms of
5 information;

6 (7) recognizes the critical role that technology
7 plays in helping independent journalists report the
8 facts on the ground;

9 (8) condemns all acts of censorship and other
10 restrictions on freedom of the press, freedom of
11 speech, and freedom of expression in Syria;

12 (9) strongly condemns all nations that assist or
13 enable the Government of Syria's ongoing repression
14 of the media; and

15 (10) reaffirms the centrality of press freedom to
16 efforts by the United States Government to support
17 democracy and promote good governance around the
18 world.

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