

I am advised that the new government of Romania under President Basescu is taking administrative steps to resolve this crisis as soon as possible and that draft legislation to rectify the shortcomings of current law will be introduced in the near future. I urge the government of Romania to act expeditiously and to ensure a fair and equitable property restitution regime for all of its citizens.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the cooperation of our distinguished colleague from Colorado, a member of the International Relations Committee, Mr. TANCREDO, for his excellent cooperation and work in behalf of H. Res. 191. I also want to thank my friend Chairman HENRY HYDE for his support in bringing this resolution to the floor today.

It is unconscionable, Mr. Speaker, that a decade and a half after the end of the communist regime in Romania we are still dealing with the problem of the restitution of religious property. The communist government in Romania, as well as communist governments elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe, wanted no challenge to their authority, and throughout that area all religious groups were systematically and meticulously brought under government control. As part of that process, most religious properties were confiscated by the communist governments for state or party use. In Romania, that amounted to the government seizure of literally thousands of religious schools, hospitals, orphanages, and other properties that religious communities used for charitable and humanitarian purposes.

With the fall of the communist governments in 1989, new democratic governments have had to deal with the restitution of this property to the religious communities. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the process in Romania has been slower and less equitable than most other post-communist countries. A series of Romanian governments since 1990 have failed to achieve a successful and fair resolution of this problem, which the European Court of Human Rights and the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe both have criticized. Resolution 191 urges the recently elected government to take the initiative and work to solve religious property restitution.

Mr. Speaker, after Congressman TANCREDO and I introduced this resolution, the recently elected government of Romania adopted legislation to deal with some of the issues that our resolution discusses, and we welcome that effort. Legislation, as we have seen, is not necessarily the solution to the problem. It will require active and continuing efforts on the part of the government to solve these problems, and we urge Romanian officials to work actively and aggressively to take the steps necessary to deal with restitution in a fair and equitable manner.

This problem essentially involves all of the religious communities in Romania other than the Romanian Orthodox Church.

The Jewish community saw communal properties confiscated by the Fascist Romanian government beginning in 1940, and these seizures were reaffirmed by the communist government when it came power after 1944. Today over 1,000 Jewish communal properties remain under Romanian government control, properties have not been restored to communal ownership, and no rent or compensation is being paid to the community for their continued use.

The four historic Hungarian religious communities—the Roman Catholic, the Hungarian Reformed, the Evangelical Lutheran, and the Unitarian churches—lost over 2,000 schools and other buildings used for charitable and humanitarian activities. Possession and use of these properties by government entities continues today in all but about thirty instances.

The Greek Catholic Church in Romania is one of the most complicated and clearly one of the most frustrating cases. In 1948, the Greek Catholic Church, which recognizes the authority of the Pope in Rome but uses the Greek Orthodox liturgy, was forcibly merged with the Romanian Orthodox Church, and its properties were merged as well or seized by the government. In 1990 the decree of 1948 was abrogated, but untangling the properties after more than a generation has been extremely difficult.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen Romanian governments delaying and postponing restitution, the Romanian courts have reversed cases that had already been resolved, and inaction by government officials have prevented equitable resolution of the vast majority of these property claims. The European Court of Human Rights ruled that the actions of various Romanian governments in religious property restitution cases in the mid-1990s “violated the European Convention on Human Rights.”

Our resolution calls upon the Romanian Government to respect and resolve these religious restitution cases in a fair, prompt and equitable manner. In the case of the Greek Catholic Church, it calls upon the government to amend fundamentally the legislation establishing a commission for resolution of conflicting claims. In cases where property cannot be restituted within a period of one year, our resolution calls for fair compensation until the restitution can be carried out.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of our colleagues to support this resolution urging the Government of Romania to recognize its responsibilities to provide equitable, prompt, and fair restitution to all religious communities for property confiscated by the former Communist government in Romania.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 191, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the resolution, as amended, was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### URGING WITHDRAWAL OF SYRIAN FORCES FROM LEBANON

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 273) urging the withdrawal of all Syrian forces from Lebanon, support for free and fair democratic elections in Lebanon, and the development of democratic institutions and safeguards to foster sovereign democratic rule in Lebanon, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. RES. 273

Whereas the people of the Lebanese Republic have a rich, proud, and honorable history dating from ancient times to the present;

Whereas Lebanon and the United States have enjoyed a history of friendship and cooperation which has been marked by the immigration of many Lebanese to the United States where they and their descendants have contributed greatly to the fabric of American life;

Whereas Syria has dominated the Lebanese political scene, resulting in a deterioration of Lebanon's human rights situation, the manipulation of Lebanese election results to meet Syria's requirements, and the imposition of curbs on Lebanon's media, once the freest in the Arab world;

Whereas Syria has publicly withdrawn its military forces from Lebanon, leaving behind, however, an intelligence structure;

Whereas Congress conditioned the lifting of sanctions on Damascus in the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003 (Public Law 108-175) upon the Government of Syria ending its occupation of Lebanon (including the complete withdrawal of intelligence and all other security-related personnel in Lebanon) and upon other factors;

Whereas the international community has, through the passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559 (2004), reaffirmed its call for the strict respect of Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity, and political independence under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon;

Whereas there remains unresolved and as a matter of national and world concern the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri, former Lebanese prime minister, which has justly been condemned as a terrorist act;

Whereas the international community has begun investigations into the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri and it is the policy of the United States to urge full cooperation with the investigations;

Whereas the international community is considering further action to promote Lebanese sovereignty;

Whereas the emancipation of political prisoners and detainees held in Syrian and Lebanese prisons is a precondition for national reconciliation and a rebuilding of Lebanon's democratic institutions; and

Whereas general elections in Lebanon are scheduled to begin on May 29, 2005: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved*, That it is the sense of the House of Representatives that—

(1) Syria should complete its withdrawal of all remaining intelligence and security forces from the Lebanese Republic in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559 (2004);

(2) Lebanon should allow unfettered access to international monitors present for the purpose of verifying compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559 (2004);

(3) Lebanon should hold free, fair, and transparent elections to begin on May 29, 2005, in accordance with all international standards and agreements;

(4) the United States should aid the people of Lebanon in their efforts to restore the separation of powers, the rule of law, and a proper respect for fundamental freedoms of every citizen; and

(5) it should be the policy of the United States Government to—

(A) support free and fair elections in Lebanon by encouraging international election assistance and observers;

(B) support a national dialogue that transcends sectarian divisions and urge the development of democratic institutions and safeguards to foster sovereign democratic rule in Lebanon; and

(C) call for the immediate release of all political prisoners and detainees held in Lebanese and Syrian prisons.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) and the gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN).

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the resolution under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Florida?

There was no objection.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Today I stand here filled with emotion and hope. When the gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL) and I began working on legislation that expressly called for Syria's full and unconditional withdrawal from Lebanon toward the restoration of the Lebanese independence, we could not have imagined that this day would come just a few years later. This is a testament to the unwavering commitment, determination, and courage of the Lebanese people and to the tireless efforts of the Lebanese-American community in the United States.

The elections scheduled to begin on May 29 mark a very important moment; but it is only the beginning of a journey toward full sovereignty and free, democratic governance. Electoral reform is necessary to ensure that future parliamentary and municipal elections are to be considered fair. We must help the Lebanese people in their quest for a free and fair electoral law as opposed to the current Syrian-orchestrated 2000 law that discriminates against certain sectors of Lebanese society and would actually help perpetuate Syrian influence in Lebanese politics.

The resolution reflects our commitment to supporting the people of Lebanon in their quest to strengthen civil society, develop democratic institutions and safeguards, and transcend sectarian divisions. A free and democratic Lebanon would have the potential to become a model for the region and a source for stability and peace.

Within this context, we must work to ensure full and immediate implementation of all aspects of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1559, beginning with international verification that Syria has withdrawn all security and intelligence forces from Lebanon. That must include the removal of pro-Syrian

security officers such as the military intelligence chief, the police chief, the directors of general security and state security. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559 clearly calls for free and fair elections devised without foreign interference and influence. We must safeguard against manipulation of the election registration process to allow Syria to keep its tentacles in Lebanese politics.

Simultaneously, steps must be undertaken, both bilaterally and in consultation with European allies and the United Nations, to ensure the immediate and unconditional disarming of all militias and terrorist organizations prior to the next round of elections.

The people of Lebanon should not have to live under repressive terrorist organizations any more than being forced to live under an oppressive Syrian-sponsored regime. For freedom and justice to fully blossom in Lebanon, all Lebanese prisoners of conscience held in Syrian and Lebanese jails must be released and the disappeared must be fully accounted for.

□ 1645

The policy of apathy must end.

Lebanon was once a land of promise, a vibrant democratic society known as the "Paris of the Middle East." Ending the occupation and conducting free, fair, and transparent elections would take a quickly recovering Lebanon one step closer to realizing its full promise.

To the people of Lebanon, I would like to say that they are an inspiration to us all. They remind us of how precious liberty is; and we assure them, as they stand for their freedom, the United States will stand with them.

I want to thank the distinguished gentleman from Michigan (Mr. MCCOTTER) for introducing this important resolution. It was a pleasure working on this text with the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. MCCOTTER) and the gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL), my partner on all of these issues. My utmost appreciation goes to the gentleman from Illinois (Chairman HYDE) and the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS), ranking member of the Committee on International Relations, as well as to our leadership for moving this resolution expeditiously and bringing it to the floor.

I urge my colleagues to support this measure and, in turn, to support the Lebanese people in their efforts to cast off the shackles of tyranny and occupation.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in strong support of this resolution. I would first like to commend the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. MCCOTTER) and the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) for their work on this important resolution.

And let me say that I quite agree with the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN), my dear friend;

when we worked together on the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act, we knew that we were doing the right thing. We absolutely made the Syrian withdrawal of Lebanon one of the four pillars of that act. But even in our wildest expectations and dreams, we could never have imagined the series of events since the passage of that act, which leads today to freedom for the Lebanese people. And I want to thank my colleagues for standing with us and passing the Act, giving it bipartisan support and enabling us to bring forward this resolution today.

It is an honor to stand on the floor of the House today, approximately 1 month after the Syrian armed forces ended their military occupation of Lebanon. Lebanon is at a crossroads, a place from which it can move forward towards democracy and freedom or take steps back toward the violence which tore it apart so many years ago.

The people of the Lebanese Republic have a rich, proud, and honorable history dating from ancient times to the present, and Lebanon has been a free and democratic nation for most of its modern history. Lebanon and the United States have enjoyed a history of friendship and cooperation which has been witnessed by the immigration of millions of Lebanese to the United States where they and their descendants have contributed greatly to the fabric of American life.

Let me say, Mr. Speaker, that in my years in Congress, I have had the honor and the pleasure to make many friends in the Lebanese American community, and I am proud of the contributions they have made to our country and American policy toward Lebanon. The Lebanese American community was a very important part of the Syria Accountability Act, and the Lebanese American community has played and is continuing to play a very important part in the freedom and democracy of Lebanon.

However, tragically, Syria dominated Lebanese politics and political leaders during its occupation, resulting in a deterioration of Lebanon's human rights situation, the engineering of Lebanese election results to Syria's liking and the imposition of curbs on Lebanon's media, once the freest in the Arab world.

Lebanon, in effect, became a Syrian satellite state where none of its leaders would dare defy the Syrian regime in Damascus. Yet a series of events caused pressure on the Syrian regime to grow. Beginning with the passage of the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Act, Congress showed very strongly that we would not tolerate this continued Syrian occupation of Lebanon.

While Syria could have made smart choices at any point, it never did, and pressure continued to grow for its full withdrawal from Lebanon, again with the President's signing the Syria Accountability Act 1 year ago. Our law

ultimately led to the Security Council's adoption of Resolution 1559, which demanded Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon and the disarmament of Hezbollah and other armed groups.

Yet the most recent developments in the effort to press Syria to leave Lebanon were sparked by the terrorist murder of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in Beirut. His assassination, which must still be thoroughly investigated by Lebanon and the international community, triggered a series of popular protests with hundreds of thousands of Lebanese taking to the streets. At one point in one of the demonstrations, literally one-quarter of the entire population of Lebanon took to the streets of Beirut to demand that the Syrian occupation end.

Yet, while Syria has today withdrawn its military forces from Lebanon, reports indicate that it has left behind a pro-Syrian intelligence structure within the Lebanese intelligence agencies. There are lots of spies, Syrian spies, still in Lebanon and lots of Syrian nationals still in Lebanon trying to control things. These people must leave, as well, and the sooner the better.

And it must be pointed out, Mr. Speaker, that not all parts of Security Resolution 1559 have been implemented. Hezbollah, the terrorist organization which receives support from Iran and Syria, remains armed to the teeth and occupies much of southern Lebanon. As Hezbollah has not given up its weaponry and its intent to maintain a military answer to the political questions of the Middle East, Hezbollah must remain completely isolated by the international community.

Earlier this year, the House passed a resolution urging the European Union to put Hezbollah on its terrorist list. As we consider this resolution today, let us renew that call. Hezbollah is a terrorist organization.

Finally, all political prisoners and the "disappeared" must be released and returned to their families. They are still existing in Lebanon, and we must get to the bottom of the disappeared people as well.

Today, the United States must stand for the same basic values in Lebanon to which we adhere at home and around the world.

Mr. Speaker, Lebanon is scheduled to hold elections on May 29, this Saturday. As such, Congress stands with the Lebanese people as they proceed to restore democracy in their once again sovereign nation. It is our hope that the upcoming elections will be free, fair, transparent, and in accordance with all relevant international standards on elections.

However, I must express one note of concern about the elections. The electoral districts in which Lebanese candidates for parliament run later this week were drawn in accordance with the 2000 electoral law, which was written by the Syrian-dominated regime during the occupation. I am concerned

that this has deprived many Lebanese from true representation as the districts were apparently drawn unfairly, packing certain groups of people into some districts while underrepresenting others. However, once these elections are completed, the United States should help the people of Lebanon in their efforts to restore the separation of powers, the rule of law, the changing of these districts, and the proper respect for fundamental freedoms of every citizen. As goes the rule of law in Lebanon and the respect for individuals, so goes the nation.

Mr. Speaker, as the sponsor, with the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN), of the Syria Accountability Act, it is an honor to be on the floor today in support of this important resolution, and I strongly urge a "yes" vote.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, next Sunday the people of Lebanon will go to the polls to start a series of parliamentary elections that will play out over the next four weeks. This resolution expresses Congress's ongoing concern that the Lebanese people be allowed to choose their own leaders freely and fairly, in light of the recent withdrawal from Lebanon of all Syrian security forces and intelligence officials, which is not yet verifiably complete. I commend our colleague Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN for bringing these important issues before us.

Mr. Speaker, freedom-loving people everywhere cheered earlier this year as the Lebanese people defied the odds, spurred on by the assassination of former prime minister Rafik Hariri, and peacefully rose up and forced the caretaker government to step down, letting key exile leaders return, and leading to the expelling of nearly all of Syria's uninformed forces from long-occupied Lebanese soil. We all hope that there will continue to be a peaceful transition to sovereign, democratic rule in Lebanon.

Sadly, the upcoming elections saw their first casualty this weekend, when adherents of rival parties clashed in the region of Metn. Government soldiers were summoned to disperse the crowds, and as they did so, one man was shot and killed. It was a somber reminder of how volatile the situation surrounding the elections can be.

Political rivalries, particularly between pro-Syrian factions and those who seek to continue reforms, threaten to further destabilize the electoral process in Lebanon; some have already threatened to boycott, which could undermine the legitimacy of the process. And the elections will be conducted according to a law passed under full Syrian occupation five years ago, which could stack the deck in favor of the Syrian elements, particularly Hezbollah. Let us hope that the wisdom of the Lebanese people, displayed in vast numbers, will over-ride the structural deficiencies of the law.

Mr. Speaker, I fully endorse this resolution's advocacy of U.S. assistance to help Lebanon restore democratic rule, including the separation of powers, the rule of law, and respect for fundamental freedoms. It is undeniably in our interest to support this process, as the flourishing of democracy in Lebanon will no doubt have a multiplier effect throughout the region.

Jordan's King Abdullah, speaking this weekend at the World Economic Forum meeting, said that this is a time for positive political re-

form in the Middle East, but it is Arabs themselves who need to develop it.

"Never has there been a greater sense of agreement that the future is in our hands," King Abdullah said. "Today, positive change is in the air across the region. It is an effort for the whole Middle East to create its own positive change. That demands a real-world process, specific steps that can be implemented by regional governments and civil society."

Mr. Speaker, one such specific step for Lebanon will be to fulfill its obligations under U.N. Security Council Resolution 1559, especially the requirement that all militias, including Hezbollah, be disarmed and disbanded. We will expect the Lebanese Armed Forces to put an immediate halt to the flow of arms across the Syrian border to Hezbollah as a first step.

Four years ago I sponsored legislation passed by the Congress that made a portion of U.S. aid to Lebanon contingent upon Lebanon's taking control of all of its borders. I do not intend to introduce a similar resolution at this moment, as I am hopeful that the new Lebanese government, once it gains its footing, will take the necessary actions to demonstrate its adherence to all aspects of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1559—the resolution that made possible Lebanon's rebirth as a nation.

But I will remain seized with these issues regarding Lebanon's borders and Hezbollah—and, in the near future, I will introduce a resolution that I hope will demonstrate that Congress shares these concerns. The stability of the entire region depends on an end to militia rule in Lebanon and full implementation of Lebanese sovereignty throughout that country and along all of its borders.

The resolution before us, Mr. Speaker, focuses on certain crucial ingredients of Lebanese sovereignty—the withdrawal of Syrian troops and the holding of free and fair elections. This is an important resolution. I support it, and I urge all of my colleagues to do likewise.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today as a long time supporter of free and fair democratic elections in the Middle East and throughout the world. Clearly, I am in support of free and fair democratic elections in Lebanon, every human being deserves the right to choose their leaders without the fear of persecution and retribution. I stand firmly in favor of honoring the voice of the Lebanese people, who have clearly called for democratic reform. I can not deny that Syria has had a long mixed history in Lebanon, clearly the will of the Lebanese people dictated it was time for the Syrian forces to leave. However, I do not believe complete condemnation of the nation of Syria will yield the results we seek. We must continue to push for completely free and fair elections in Lebanon, but I feel that we must engage Syria in a dialogue instead of turning a cold shoulder to them.

I fully support the idea that Syria should complete its withdrawal of all remaining intelligence and security forces from the Lebanese Republic in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559. However, I do not believe we should condemn Syria for their relationship with Lebanon, but we must now engage in an examination to determine if the current relationship between Syria and Lebanon can now be improved. We must seek

to build relationships in the Middle East as opposed to tearing them down. Our goal is to establish greater stability and a more free society in the Middle East; to accomplish these lofty goals we must press forward with new initiatives as opposed to complete condemnations. Therefore, we must push for international election monitors in Lebanon so that free, fair, and transparent elections can be held on May 29, 2005, in accordance with all international standards and agreements. We must ensure that no outside nation or entity has undue influence on these elections, which should be determined only by the will of the Lebanese people.

I am in support of H. Res. 273 because the ideal of free and fair elections can not be questioned, especially when sanctioned by international law. However, I do hope the sponsors and supporters of this resolution will try to use this as an opportunity to open relations with Syria instead of further closing them. If we are to have true success in the Middle East we must ensure that we reach out to every nation in the region and its people, otherwise we are only cheating ourselves of a historic prospect for peace.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DANIEL E. LUNGREN of California). The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 273, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the resolution, as amended, was agreed to.

The title of the resolution was amended so as to read: "Resolution recognizing the courageous efforts of the people of Lebanon to restore their independence and urging the withdrawal of all Syrian forces from Lebanon, the support for free and fair democratic elections in Lebanon, and the development of democratic institutions and safeguards to foster sovereign democratic rule in Lebanon."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### WELCOMING HAMID KARZAI AND SUPPORTING STRONG AND ENDURING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN UNITED STATES AND AFGHANISTAN

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 153) welcoming His Excellency Hamid Karzai, the President of Afghanistan, on the occasion of his visit to the United States in May 2005 and expressing support for a strong and enduring strategic partnership between the United States and Afghanistan.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 153

Whereas Afghanistan, a great nation located at the crossroads of many civiliza-

tions, has suffered the ravages of war, foreign intervention, occupation, and oppression;

Whereas the Afghan people courageously resisted the decade-long occupation of their country by the former Soviet Union, forcing a Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and thereby contributing to the end of the Cold War;

Whereas following the Soviet withdrawal, Afghanistan went through a period of chaos and conflict, exacerbated by insufficient attention from the international community, during which time the Taliban militia seized control of much of the country and provided a base of operations to Al Qaeda and other terrorist elements;

Whereas following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States launched Operation Enduring Freedom, liberating the Afghan people from tyranny, transforming Afghanistan from a haven for terrorists into a strategic partner in the struggle against international terrorism, and helping Afghans build a democratic government;

Whereas the Afghan Constitution, drafted by a broadly representative Loya Jirga, or Grand Council, and enacted on January 4, 2004, provides for equal rights for and full participation of women, mandates full compliance with international norms for human and civil rights, establishes procedures for free and fair elections, creates a system of checks and balances between the executive, legislative and judicial branches, encourages a free market economy and private enterprise, and obligates the state to prevent all types of terrorist activity and the production and trafficking of narcotics;

Whereas more than 10.5 million Afghan men and women voted in national presidential elections in October 2004, demonstrating commitment to democracy, courage in the face of threats of violence, and a deep sense of civic responsibility;

Whereas Hamid Karzai, formerly the interim President, was elected to a five-year term as Afghanistan's first democratically-elected President in the country's history;

Whereas nationwide parliamentary elections are planned for September 18, 2005, and further demonstrate the Afghan Government's commitment to adhere to democratic norms;

Whereas the Government of Afghanistan has demonstrated a firm commitment to halting the cultivation and trafficking of narcotics and has cooperated fully with the United States and its allies on a wide range of counter-narcotics initiatives;

Whereas in addition to military and law enforcement operations, President Karzai welcomes the United States and the international community to assist Afghanistan's counter-narcotics campaign by supporting programs to provide alternative livelihoods for farmers, sustained economic development, and governmental and security capacity building;

Whereas recognizing that long-term political stability requires sustained economic security, Afghanistan is striving to create an economic base to provide meaningful livelihoods for all of its people, and the United States has a cooperative interest in helping Afghanistan achieve this goal;

Whereas section 101(1) of the Afghanistan Freedom Support Act of 2002 (22 U.S.C. 7511(1)) declares that the "United States and the international community should support efforts that advance the development of democratic civil authorities and institutions in Afghanistan and the establishment of a new broad-based, multi-ethnic, gender-sensitive, and fully representative government in Afghanistan";

Whereas on June 15, 2004, during President Karzai's visit to the United States, President

George W. Bush stated: "Afghanistan's journey to democracy and peace deserves the support and respect of every nation. . . . The world and the United States stand with [the people of Afghanistan] as partners in their quest for peace and prosperity and stability and democracy.";

Whereas on June 15, 2004, in his address to a joint meeting of Congress, President Karzai stated: "We must build a partnership that will consolidate our achievements and enhance stability, prosperity and democracy in Afghanistan and in the region. This requires sustaining and accelerating the reconstruction of Afghanistan, through long-term commitment. . . . We must enhance our strategic partnership. The security of our two nations are intertwined.";

Whereas on April 13, 2005, while receiving the visiting United States Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, President Karzai, in expressing the desire of the Afghan people for a long-term strategic partnership with the United States, stated: "They want this relationship to be a wholesome one, including a sustained economic relationship, a political relationship, and most important of all, a strategic security relationship that would enable Afghanistan to defend itself, to continue to prosper, to stop interferences, the possibility of interferences in Afghanistan."; and

Whereas the people of the United States, and their elected representatives, are honored to welcome President Karzai back to the United States in May 2005 on a visit that will further advance the close partnership between the United States and Afghanistan: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That—*

(1) Congress welcomes the first democratically-elected President of Afghanistan, His Excellency Hamid Karzai, as an honored guest and valued friend upon his visit to the United States in May 2005; and

(2) it is the sense of Congress that—

(A) a democratic, stable, and prosperous Afghanistan is a vital security interest of the United States; and

(B) a strong and enduring strategic partnership between the United States and Afghanistan should continue to be a primary objective of both countries to advance a shared vision of peace, freedom, security, and broad-based economic development between the two countries and throughout the world.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) and the gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN).

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the concurrent resolution under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Florida?

There was no objection.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

It is a pleasure to welcome His Excellency Hamid Karzai, the President of Afghanistan, to the United States and