

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in continued support of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the nation of Ukraine and stand with the people of that country for their liberty and full human rights.

The first objective of international efforts to calm Ukraine must be the overriding goal of no more bloodshed. The world community of nations must step up forcefully to affirm Ukraine's new government, and not just for the sake of tomorrow.

Morally, nations that had supported Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin or were bystanders to communism and Nazism that slaughtered millions and millions of people inside those borders owe Ukraine an historical debt. No place on Earth suffered more. As the demonstrators on Maidan have proven, tyrants and corrupt officials couldn't kill Ukraine's people's longing for freedom and liberty.

This is Ukraine's moment, and it is a breakpoint in liberty's march that history will judge.

Where do we go from here? Our path must be diplomatic, economic, humanitarian, and military. Diplomatically, the international community must affirm Ukraine and her interim government. I commend President Obama and Secretary Kerry for their leadership. Yesterday, the OSCE announced that 18 participating countries will send 35 unarmed military observers to Ukraine. Let them reveal the truth.

Countries with large Ukrainian diaspora, like our country, along with Poland, Canada, Argentina, Italy, Portugal, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Kazakhstan, should seek constructive means to help.

Further, the world community and OSCE should assure sufficient election monitors are recruited and trained for the upcoming elections in Ukraine on May 25. Then, economically, the world community should proceed to work through Ukraine's financial challenges. However, any financial assistance to Ukraine should be contingent on repayment, and Ukraine's new government must clearly define performance standards and lay out a reasonable plan to repay any foreign aid.

Transitioning from a kleptocracy to a functioning state will require technical assistance, management expertise, and loaned personnel from governments throughout the world. In addition, the United States and other nations should impose targeted financial, economic, trade, and travel sanctions on Russian assets on a timetable that demonstrates our resolve.

The United Nations and global supporters of Ukraine must respond if Ukraine requests humanitarian relief to those places most in need. As long as Russian aggression persists, its participation in the G8 should be suspended. And, finally, militarily, the parties to the 1994 Budapest accords should enforce that agreement.

In addition, Ukraine exists in an inferior military posture to its more pow-

erful neighboring states. To remedy this shortcoming, NATO should create a new category of provisional membership for nations whose military has fought alongside NATO member forces in the war on terrorism. Ukraine has.

As a true borderland region, Ukraine is positioned to be truly a bridge between East, West, North, and South in that most important region of Central Europe. The free world must walk with Ukraine as she moves toward a more free and democratic future. There is no turning back.

SEVENTH CENTURY RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WOLF) for 5 minutes.

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, much ink has been used regarding Secretary of State John Kerry's comments this weekend characterizing Vladimir Putin's outrageous incursion into Ukraine as a "19th century act in the 21st century." But if we are looking through the lens of history, it is also worth noting what a small community of Syrian Christians has been forced to endure.

Writing in National Review Online this week, stalwart religious freedom advocate Nina Shea authored a piece, headlined, "Syrian Jihadists Are Forcing Christians to Become Dhimmis Under Seventh-Century Rules." Shea notes:

The religious persecution in Syria deepened this week, as evidenced by a written ultimatum purportedly distributed by the rebel jihadist group ISIS, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, to Christians in the northern providence capital of Raqqa.

Rejecting conversion to Islam or death, some 20 Christian leaders of that city held firm in their faith and submitted to the Islamists' demands to live by as dhimmis.

Shea continued to explain the implications of this status. She said:

Under this arrangement, in exchange for their lives and the ability to worship as Christians, they must abide by purported seventh-century rules of Caliph Umar.

According to the Raqqa ultimatum, these include bans on renovating and rebuilding churches and monasteries, many of which need repair because they have been shelled and blown up over the past 3 years, and bans against the public display of crosses and Christian symbols and the ringing of bells.

She went on to say:

They are forbidden from reading Scripture indoors loud enough for Muslims outside to hear, and the practice of their faith must be confined within the walls of their remaining churches, not exercised publicly at, for example, weddings or funerals.

Many have remarked that Raqqa was once one of Syria's most liberal cities. Its Christian community numbered about 3,000 before the conflict. They have since been devastated by violence and migration. Their exact number today is unknown.

This month marks the anniversary of the uprising which eventually spiraled into the war and violence which has

terrorized Syria for 3 years now. Muslims and Christians alike have experienced horrific violence. But, as Shea quotes:

The Christians who remain in Raqqa must now bear the additional suffering of dhimmitude.

Their plight, while more stark, given the official nature of their subjugation, parallels, in many ways, that of other besieged religious minorities, specifically Christians throughout the broader Middle East.

The latest outrage finally garnered a statement from the Department of State's spokesman. But a statement provides little solace to a people facing death, forced conversion, or, in the case of these Christian leaders who refused to abandon their faith, an exacting toll to abide by the dictates of their conscience.

Such an outrage demands a response from policymakers and faith leaders alike. I have joined with Congresswoman ANNA ESHOO and others in sending a letter to Secretary Kerry urging the Department of State to cooperate with a Syria Study Group to be facilitated by the Washington, D.C.-based Atlantic Council. The study group would be charged with producing a report as quickly as possible that would help the administration and Congress identify and implement ways for bringing this crisis to a close in a manner fully consistent with the interests and the political transition objectives of the United States. Surely the protection of ancient faith communities like Syria's Christian community is one such interest.

Meanwhile, I believe that it is critical for the faith community in the West, specifically the Church in America, to find its voice on behalf of our marginalized and persecuted brothers and sisters abroad, be they in Syria, Egypt, or Iraq. I meet regularly with representatives of these groups. They are desperate for help, or at least the solidarity, and they cannot understand the seeming lack of urgency by their brethren here in America, and, frankly, nor can I.

HONORING DALLAS COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL, ALABAMA'S CLASS 4A STATE BASKETBALL CHAMPIONS 2014

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Alabama (Ms. SEWELL) for 5 minutes.

Ms. SEWELL of Alabama. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to honor the Dallas County High School Hornets on winning the State of Alabama title in the class 4A State basketball championship on Saturday, March 1, 2014. On behalf of the Seventh Congressional District, I pay honor and tribute to the Hornets for their exemplary athleticism and teamwork, as well as the outstanding leadership of Head Coach Willie Moore and his coaching staff.

Dallas County High School's basketball championship victory capped off

an impressive season of 28 wins and 4 losses. With each victory during the season, the team remained humble and grounded. In every game, these young men and the coaching staff pursued excellence and were driven by hard work, determination, and teamwork.

Throughout the season, Coach Willie Moore encouraged the team by quoting Whitney Young, Jr.:

It is better to be prepared for an opportunity and not have one than to have an opportunity and not be prepared.

The Hornets finished the 2013–2014 season undefeated in their region and lost only four games overall. To earn their place in the championship title game, Dallas County beat other high school teams during the tournament, including Madison County, Dora, Bibb County, and Beauregard.

□ 1045

On March 1, 2014, the Dallas County Hornets came to the 4A State Championship prepared for the opportunity they had earned. The championship game against J.O. Johnson High School from Huntsville, Alabama, was a nail-biter from start to finish. The Hornets never gave up, even when they were behind. At halftime, the Hornets were down by 11 points, but in the third quarter, the Hornets made a thrilling comeback.

Senior William Lee made a 3-pointer at the regulation buzzer to force the game into overtime. The 6'9" standout and UAB signee William Lee continued to show dominance during the overtime by making three crucial free throws with 5.4 seconds to play. The Hornets won a 51–48 victory, taking the Class 4A High School Boys State Championship. William Lee scored 22 points, made 13 rebounds and seven blocks.

As the daughter of a high school basketball coach, I know that this decisive victory is the result of a tremendous effort on the part of all the players and the coaching staff at Dallas County High School. Spurred on by an enthusiastic student body and encouraging faculty and families, this team proved that outstanding achievements are possible even in rural Black Belt Alabama. I couldn't be prouder of this amazing accomplishment.

The State high school basketball championship victory is truly a reflection of the hard work and steadfast determination of the entire team and coaching staff. Members of the team include Jayden Buford, Scott Cole, Raheem Phillips, Kendell Motley, Jerrod Moorer, Henry Baker, Timothy Baker, Travon Muse, Javaris Muse, B.J. Leshore, William Lee, Ladarius Furlow, and Lowell Furlow.

I would like to also acknowledge and pay tribute to the head coach, Willie Moore, and assistant coaches, Cliff Nix, Charles Thompson, Kenny Allen, Justin Moore, and Hugh Martin for their outstanding work.

On behalf of the Seventh Congressional District, the State of Alabama,

and this Nation, I ask my colleagues to join me in celebrating the accomplishments of the Dallas County High School basketball team for their victory in Alabama's Class 4A State Basketball Championship. We honor and pay tribute to this team, the coaches and the school for this distinguished honor, and we appreciate their contributions to the school spirit and the community pride that we have in them.

Congratulations, and go Hornets.

RESTRICTIONS ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOMS AROUND THE WORLD

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. BYRNE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BYRNE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in this House on Ash Wednesday to talk about a problem that should be heavy on the hearts of everyone in this body and around the Nation, and that is the persecution of Christians around the world.

Millions of Christians will start their Lenten period of fasting and penitence today, and over the next several weeks will act out their faith leading up to Holy Week, when we remember the death and crucifixion of Jesus, and then the feast of Easter, his resurrection.

Sadly, in too many parts of the world, Christians will not be allowed to openly profess their faith and act out the things that for centuries Christians have been able to do.

This chart on my left, which was prepared by the Pew Research Center, shows that around the world there is religious persecution, but it is particularly bad in Asia and, sadly, in the Middle East, the very part of the world where Jesus came from.

This next chart from the same source shows that the problem is getting worse, not better. Sadly, we are seeing that the perpetrators are now more frequently governments than private individuals in these countries. The bottom part of this chart tells us the saddest news of all: the most likely people in the world to be persecuted for their religious beliefs are Christians. This is a little-known fact to many people. For some reason, the news media has not been willing to cover it as well as they should have been, but perhaps during this season of Lent in preparation for Easter, it is a time when all of us can understand that this is a real problem, a humanitarian problem, a problem for the rights and freedoms of people all over the world.

Now, there is something we can do about it, but we need to understand the problem more specifically to do so.

This last chart perhaps is the most troubling of all. In 1914, Christians made up about 20 percent of the entire population of the Middle East. By 2013, they made up only 4 percent. In Iraq since 2003, almost a million Christians have fled that country. Since the troubles began in Syria in 2011, half a mil-

lion Christians have fled. In Egypt since the troubles there in 2011, 100,000 Coptic Christians have left that country.

Now, if you look at what is happening in Iraq and Egypt, that should be of particular concern to us because we will send this year to each of those two countries in aid over \$1 billion. That is taxpayer money that has been brought to our government and that we send to those countries from the people of the United States of America. I believe we should exercise a different foreign policy. Not only should we state that we are going to stand up for the protection of religious minorities around the world that are persecuted, but in countries like Iraq and Egypt where we send hundreds of millions of dollars of aid, we should demand it, and we should demand it not just because we are a country in which the majority of people are Christians but because it is the right thing to do, and we have historically done that as a Nation.

As we go toward Holy Week and people around the world remember that Jesus Christ himself was persecuted to death, and for centuries thereafter throughout the Roman Empire, throughout what we today call the Middle East, Christians were persecuted, we need to make sure that the clock is not going to be rolled back, as it clearly is today. The United States of America, our President, our Secretary of State, this body, the entire Congress, and the American people should do what we have traditionally done, and that is to stand up for the rights of people around the world. In this particular context, that means standing up for Christians who are being persecuted and killed merely because of their beliefs.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 10 o'clock and 52 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker at noon.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Patrick J. Conroy, offered the following prayer: Dear Lord, we give You thanks for giving us another day.

We use this moment to be reminded of Your presence and to tap the resources needed by the Members of this people's House to do their work as well as it can be done.

As the world observes the tensions mounting within Ukraine and Venezuela, may we all note well the crippling effects of ideological divides