

108TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. CON. RES. 363

Expressing the grave concern of Congress regarding the continuing gross violations of human rights and civil liberties of the Syrian people by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 11, 2004

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN (for herself, Mr. BLUNT, Mr. ENGEL, Mr. ACKERMAN, Mr. SMITH of New Jersey, Mr. CHABOT, Mr. CROWLEY, Mr. PENCE, Mr. McCOTTER, Mr. TANCREDO, Mr. BERMAN, Mrs. JO ANN DAVIS of Virginia, Mr. BURTON of Indiana, Ms. BERKLEY, and Mr. LANTOS) submitted the following concurrent resolution; which was referred to the Committee on International Relations

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Expressing the grave concern of Congress regarding the continuing gross violations of human rights and civil liberties of the Syrian people by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Whereas the Syrian Arab Republic is governed by an authoritarian regime which, according to the 2003 Department of State Report on Human Rights Practices, continues to commit serious human rights abuses, including “the use of torture” and “arbitrary arrest and detention”;

Whereas hundreds of political prisoners in Syria have never been tried for any offense, in violation of Article 9 of the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of December 10, 1948);

Whereas the 2003 Department of State Human Rights Report states that Syria “significantly restricts freedom of speech and of the press”, that “freedom of assembly does not exist under the law”, and that “the Government restricted freedom of association”;

Whereas a recent press law enacted in September 2001 permits Syria to arbitrarily deny or revoke publishing licenses for such vague reasons as “related to the public interest”, and compels privately owned media sources to submit all material to government censors for clearance;

Whereas Syrian authorities have arrested two journalists for writing articles published in Lebanese newspapers criticizing Syria;

Whereas foreign media correspondents have been expelled from Syria for reporting that runs contrary to what is officially sanctioned by Syria;

Whereas Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”;

Whereas Article 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.”;

Whereas Human Rights Watch reports that Syria maintains its “pressure on the country’s fragile human rights movement through a combination of intimidation, criminal prosecution of leading activists, and imprisonment”;

Whereas Amnesty International has reported that the security forces of Syria are targeting emerging human rights organizations in Syria in an apparent attempt to intimidate those organizations into ceasing their work in Syria;

Whereas attorneys in Syria working with these Syrian human rights organizations have reportedly been harassed and persecuted by the government-controlled bar association, which works closely with the ruling Ba'ath Party and the government security forces;

Whereas the criminal law of Syria allows for the acquittal of an accused rapist if the suspect marries the victim;

Whereas the criminal law of Syria provides for reduced sentences in cases of "honor" killings;

Whereas the family law of Syria as applied to Muslim women is governed by Sharia (Islamic) law and is discriminatory in marriage, divorce, and inheritance matters;

Whereas Article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law.";

Whereas the infringement by Syria on human rights and civil liberties extends into the Lebanese Republic, which it continues to occupy in violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions;

Whereas Human Rights Watch, in its 2003 World Report, stated that: "Political activists in Lebanon continued to demand the withdrawal of all Syrian forces from the country and organized demonstrations throughout the year, many of which the internal security forces dispersed forcibly";

Whereas nongovernmental organizations in Lebanon continue their efforts to discover the fate of the nearly 200 “disappeared” Lebanese citizens believed to have been the victims of arbitrary detention or “disappearance” by the Syrian authorities; and

Whereas Freedom House, in its Special Report to the 59th Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in 2003, classified Syria as “One of the World’s Most Repressive Regimes” for its severe repression of political and civil liberties and its egregious violations of human dignity: Now, therefore, be it

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

3 (1) condemns the numerous violations of funda-
4 mental human rights by the Government of the Syr-
5 ian Arab Republic;

6 (2) calls on the international community to
7 adopt a resolution at the upcoming 60th Session of
8 the United Nations Commission on Human Rights
9 which details the dismal human rights record of
10 Syria and establishes a Special Rapporteur to fur-
11 ther investigate these abuses;

12 (3) expresses its support for the people of Syria
13 in their daily struggle for freedom, respect for
14 human rights and civil liberties, democratic self-gov-
15 ernance, and the establishment of the rule of law;

16 (4) encourages the President and the Secretary
17 of State, acting through the Middle East Partner-

1 ship Initiative (managed by the Department of
2 State) and other avenues, to reach out to dissidents,
3 human rights activists, and the pro-democracy oppo-
4 sition in Syria, and to assist them in their efforts;
5 and

6 (5) urges the adoption and pursuit of these and
7 other policies to seek a democratic government in
8 Syria that will—

9 (A) restore freedom to the people of Syria;

10 (B) cease the illegal occupation by Syria of
11 the Lebanese Republic;

12 (C) abandon support for terrorism by
13 Syria; and

14 (D) live in peace and security with the
15 international community.

○