

H. Res. 415

In the House of Representatives, U.S.,

September 14, 1998.

Whereas Africa's numerous ethnic groups, with an estimated 2,000 languages and dialects, have long been isolated from each other;

Whereas radio is the primary means of transmitting vital information in Africa and linking African populations;

Whereas poverty, illiteracy, and logistical difficulties make television and the print media less utilized means of communication;

Whereas radio is not only compatible with Africa's oral traditions, but has the added benefit of being affordable and adaptable;

Whereas African radio stations generally are owned and operated by governments, which being aware of radio's power often deny or delay applications for proposed independent radio stations, harass officials or staff of independent radio stations, or close independent radio stations;

Whereas 53 independent journalists in Africa have been killed over the past 8 years, 42 other journalists were imprisoned last year alone, and hundreds of others have been threatened, harassed, or even physically assaulted;

Whereas standards of journalistic professionalism often are low in Africa, which causes problems of accuracy in re-



porting that often lead governments to overreact and apply repressive legal remedies against the media, including radio broadcasts;

Whereas biased government radio broadcasts have promoted ruling parties and limited coverage of opposition political parties, while inhibiting the free flow of information necessary for citizens to effectively exercise their electoral choices, thus undermining democracy;

Whereas the promotion of independent ownership of local radio operations in Africa is a useful tool for advancing the United States foreign policy objective of promoting democracy and human rights;

Whereas the phenomenon of “hate radio” has fueled genocide in countries such as Rwanda, in which an estimated half million persons were killed in a largely ethnic purge in 1994;

Whereas surrogate broadcasting, which consists of locally generated news on issues of local concern, has been well demonstrated as a vehicle to promote democracy and human rights in repressed regions and countries throughout the world;

Whereas the Voice of America has designed the “Radio Democracy for Africa” project to create a surrogate radio operation throughout Africa to promote democracy and human rights; and

Whereas the African Growth and Opportunity Act calls for the United States Information Agency to use its broadcasts to promote economic reforms in addition to its current promotion of political reforms: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) supports the creation and operation of the Voice of America’s surrogate radio project known as “Radio Democracy for Africa” which includes journalist training and journalist exchange components;

(2) urges the United States Information Agency to expand its economic, political, and human rights programming in Africa to support indigenous efforts aimed at promoting democratization, human rights, economic development, and good governance;

(3) calls on the Agency for International Development to adopt a comprehensive strategy for the promotion of free and independent African media, especially radio, by supporting journalist and other media training programs, assisting in the development of African media associations, facilitating the creation of African news gathering and delivery networks, and encouraging the use of radio as an educational medium on a variety of topics, including but not limited to democracy, human rights, and economic development;

(4) calls on the United States Government to encourage local and foreign investment in independent local radio operations in Africa;

(5) urges the United States Government to make freedom of speech and the safety of journalists a priority

in discussions with African governments on democracy and human rights;

(6) encourages the United States Government to use all reasonable means to help safeguard the operation of independent radio stations and the legitimate activities of journalists in African countries; and

(7) urges the United States Government to support and assist the development of mechanisms and institutions for the protection of independent journalists and to discourage the now frequent use of draconian laws and government policies inhibiting freedom of speech in Africa.

Attest:

Clerk.