

109TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. CON. RES. 18

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 17, 2005

Received and referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

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

Whereas the Syrian Arab Republic is governed by an authoritarian regime which continues to commit serious human rights abuses, including the use of torture and arbitrary arrest and detention;

Whereas the Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2004 states that Syria's "human rights record remained poor, and the

Government continued to commit numerous, serious abuses”, the government “significantly restricts freedom of speech and of the press”, “freedom of assembly does not exist under the law”, and “the Government restricted freedom of association”;

Whereas Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “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 that “Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.”;

Whereas Syria’s September 2001 press law permits the government to arbitrarily deny or revoke publishing licenses for vague reasons and compels media to submit all material to government censors;

Whereas Syrian authorities have arrested, or, in the case of foreigners, expelled journalists for writing critically about Syria’s policies;

Whereas Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have reported that the security forces of Syria are targeting emerging Syrian human rights organizations, as well as their attorneys, in an apparent attempt to intimidate those organizations;

Whereas, on March 8, 2004, Syrian security forces arrested more than 30 human rights dissidents and civilians at a sit-in in front of the parliament;

Whereas a United States diplomat who was watching the peaceful demonstrations was also arrested and held for an hour in what the United States called an unacceptable violation of diplomatic practice and which the United States protested “in the strongest terms”;

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

Whereas the criminal law of Syria provides for reduced sentences in cases of “honor” killings, and spousal rape is not illegal;

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 hundreds of Lebanese civilians are believed to have been killed or “disappeared” by Syrian occupation forces or its secret police;

Whereas hundreds of Kurdish civilians were injured or killed in clashes with the Syrian authorities in March 2004 in Qamishli, a city in northeastern Syria, and Syrian security forces arrested and tortured Syrian Kurdish civilians from the town of Al-Malikiyah on January 9, 2005;

Whereas Syrian authorities continue their harassment of Aktham Naisse, Syria’s leading human rights activist, President, and founding member of the Committees for the Defense of Democratic Liberties and Human Rights in Syria, and the 2005 winner of the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders, one of the most prestigious awards in the global human rights commu-

nity, by charging him with spreading false information, forming an underground association with links to international human rights groups, and opposing the Baath Party;

Whereas, in November 2004, upon his release from prison, Kamal Labwani, a 48-year-old physician in Syria, stated that there are at least 400 political prisoners in Syria, 100 of whom have been jailed for at least 20 years;

Whereas Mr. Labwani urged “all defenders of freedom and human rights, whether individuals, associations, or bodies, or international, Arab, or local organizations to participate with us in this campaign to call for the immediate release of all political prisoners and detainees of opinion and conscience”;

Whereas, in November 2004, Syrian journalist Louai Hussein was banned from writing by the Syrian Interior Ministry’s political security office;

Whereas, in November 2004, the arrest in Germany of a Syrian embassy official for espionage and issuing threats against the Syrian opposition in Europe is evidence of a campaign reportedly launched by Syrian dictator Bashar Assad, aimed at intimidating the regime’s opposition abroad;

Whereas thousands of Syrian citizens, along with their families, children, and grandchildren, live outside their country in forced exile, solely because of their political views, or because of the views of members of their families; and

Whereas human rights and democracy groups in Syria have sponsored a petition urging greater freedoms and the release of all political prisoners: Now, therefore, be it

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

3 (1) condemns the consistent pattern of gross
4 violations of internationally recognized human rights
5 by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic;

6 (2) calls on the international community to
7 adopt a resolution at the upcoming session of the
8 United Nations Commission on Human Rights
9 which details the dismal human rights record of
10 Syria;

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

15 (4) encourages the President and the Secretary
16 of State to reach out to dissidents, human rights ac-
17 tivists, and the nonviolent democratic opposition in
18 Syria, and to assist them in their efforts; and

19 (5) urges the adoption and pursuit of these and
20 other policies to seek a democratic government in
21 Syria that will—

22 (A) bring freedom and democracy to the
23 people of Syria;

24 (B) cease the illegal occupation by Syria of
25 the Lebanese Republic;

1 (C) abandon support for terrorism;

2 (D) not pursue research, development, ac-
3 quisition, production, transfer, or deployment of
4 biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons, will
5 provide credible assurances that such behavior
6 will not be undertaken in the future, and will
7 agree to allow United Nations and other inter-
8 national observers to verify such assurances;
9 and

10 (E) live in peace and security with the
11 international community.

Passed the House of Representatives March 17,
2005.

Attest:

JEFF TRANDAHL,

Clerk.