

them in educating parents and providing children the skills they need to swim safely and avoid harm.

SECRET PROGRAM TO SUPPLY
ARMS TO REBELS IN SYRIA

HON. RICHARD M. NOLAN

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 31, 2014

Mr. NOLAN. Mr. Speaker, I am deeply disappointed with the recent reporting of a new, covert, secret U.S. program—not secret to the intelligence communities throughout the world, but secret to the American people—to supply military weapons and equipment to arm the rebels in Syria.

Mr. Speaker, we've spent the last thirteen years sending arms into the Middle East, and now the region is blowing up.

I commend President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry for their commitment to finding diplomatic solutions in preventing these wars and challenges—especially for their recent efforts to achieve an immediate ceasefire and settlement between Israelis and Palestinians.

However, I am deeply disturbed by these repeated undercover missions to fan the flames of foreign wars by inserting more military weapons and equipment into the conflicts. These efforts run contrary to our work of diplomacy and toward lasting peace—and what's more, are time and time again executed without seeking the Constitutionally-granted authority of the Congress of the United States.

I firmly believe that if the question were brought before the Congress, many of these programs would never be sanctioned.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, these are arms that all too often end up in the hands of our worst enemies. And this apparent determination on the part of the Administration to send weapons into so many regional conflicts only serves to escalate the violence, prolong the fighting, and stir feelings of ill will toward America.

Mr. Speaker, I've said this before—we have no friends in these fights.

We must get over the tired and fallacious notion that the enemies of our enemies are our friends.

I urge the Administration to remember that it is the Congress—not the President—that has authority over matters of war and peace.

I strongly urge my colleagues to remember our constitutional obligation to consider the future untold costs of these so-called wars of choice and nation-building abroad.

Those monies and resources are urgently needed here at home—in reducing the deficit, rebuilding America—creating good-paying jobs restoring our roads and bridges—and reinvesting in our people and our future by renewing our support for education, basic research in science, medicine, technology, and clean energy.

MEMBER ONLINE ALL-STAR
COMPETITION

HON. GREGORY W. MEEKS

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 31, 2014

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to have my office participate in the Democratic Whip Office's fifth annual "Member Online All-Star Competition." I applaud my colleagues for a friendly and spirited three week competition, and I congratulate the All-stars who led House Democrats in collectively acquiring over 213,000 new followers on social media.

I am always delighted to find new ways to engage my constituents and all Americans. To that end, my staff did an outstanding job making many new connections. I especially commend Ladan Ahmadi in my office for her tremendous effort to take us to the final round with our Vine video.

I thank the Democratic Whip for building on and fostering comity in the People's House. I know that we are all better off for it, and our work on the behalf of the American people is enhanced by it.

THE TROUBLING CASE OF MERIAM
IBRAHIM

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 31, 2014

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, for weeks this spring, the world watched as Meriam Ibrahim Ishag, a pregnant Christian woman in Sudan, faced flogging and the death penalty because her government would not accept that she had lived her life as a Christian and married a Christian man. Meriam has demonstrated both courage and grace under pressure—giving birth in jail in May while chained and caring for her two children, including her newborn, not only under restraints, but also without the normal amenities that any pregnant woman and nursing mother should expect.

The harsh application of Sharia law on non-Muslims was the trigger for a two-decade civil war in Sudan and the eventual secession of the South. Sudan is one of 20 countries in the world who have laws against apostasy—defined as the abandonment by an individual of their original religion. In Sudan, apostasy is effectively considered leaving the Muslim faith, particularly the interpretation of Islam followed by authorities. In Sudan, to leave the Muslim faith is an automatic death sentence. If you are considered an apostate, you cannot legally marry someone of another faith, and for this, Meriam also was charged with adultery and sentenced to flogging.

However, this story is not just about harshly applied religious and legal principles in violation of national and international law. Daniel Wani, Meriam's husband, is a Christian who is a dual American and South Sudanese citizen. He has lived in the United States for more than a decade. He married Meriam in late 2011, and they had a son a year later. Somehow, the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum could not find a way to help this American to get his family out of Sudan before a crisis developed,

even after she was arrested and released last year in charges involving apostasy.

A hearing that I recently convened was intended to examine the facts as we know them to determine how strictly applied rules almost led to the officially sanctioned beating and execution of a young woman who has lived as a Christian all her life, but who has now been told that she has no right to choose her religious belief.

This hearing was originally supposed to take place in June, but at the urging of both the U.S. Government and Sudanese officials, we postponed it to allow for quiet diplomacy to take place. However, prior to the hearing, Meriam's legal entanglements seem to be increasing rather than diminishing.

A Sudanese court initially ruled that the mere fact that her father was Muslim means that she should have been raised as a Muslim. She was given three days to convert to Islam, but she told authorities she would not abandon her Christian faith. Her refusal to leave the faith she had practiced her entire life led to her being in mortal fear for her life.

Fortunately, a Sudanese appeals court believed that she considered herself Christian and overturned her conviction on apostasy and adultery charges. However, members of her family have appealed the overturning of her conviction. Meanwhile, the Government of Sudan rearrested Meriam for using South Sudanese documents in an attempt to leave the country, and while she was released on bail. Fortunately, she was able to leave Sudan last week.

We cannot be absolutely certain of the exact chain of events that led to the situation that Meriam was in prior to her release. The Department of State understandably declined to testify last week because of the sensitive nature of the then ongoing efforts to end the matter satisfactorily. Daniel and Meriam were still in Sudan at that point. Daniel was free to leave with his children, but he chose, of course, to stay with his wife, until she too could leave with her family.

Since Meriam's conviction in May, a bipartisan, bicameral Congressional coalition worked to undo the harsh penalties for her under the apostasy and adultery laws and secure her family's repatriation to the United States. Contact was made with Daniel, as well as the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum and the Sudan embassy in Washington. Eventually, the headquarters offices of both the State Department and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services got involved.

Yet one wonders why this matter had to come to a crisis stage before a means could be found to avoid what now seems to have been an inevitable outcome in this case. Daniel told congressional staff that he sought help from the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum but was told that he should seek an attorney since the situation was mostly focused on his wife, who was not an American. This was the advice he received even when he was arrested and had his passport seized. An American citizen should expect more from his government's representatives in a foreign country when that country's government has taken action against them.

Under the principles of natural law, which are the basis of our governing documents and those of countries around the world, there are certain inalienable rights endowed by Our Creator. The decision on how to worship Our Creator is one of them.