

colleagues who have expressed congratulations to the people of Guatemala for ending decades of civil war and embarking on a courageous effort to rebuild their country together. The peace and national reunification that has resulted from this process represents the beginning of a bright new day for this country which has seen so much horror and loss in the past.

The civil war in Guatemala was one of the longest and bloodiest of this century. In the 36 years of fighting, the fabric of Guatemalan society was torn apart. As the peace process takes hold, the people of Guatemala will have to begin the arduous work of recreating their society and repairing the institutions that must serve them in the years to come. It is my hope that resolutions such as this, and the positive role that the United States played in the peace process, will become the symbols of a new era of United States involvement in Guatemala. I believe that we have much to offer the people of Guatemala in their efforts to build democratic institution and refashion a civil society, and I hope that they will turn to us for help.

I continue to be concerned that, although the war has ended, the culture of impunity that has long plagued Guatemala remains. The Law of National Reconciliation established a general amnesty for war crimes, as well as a truth commission to help heal the wounds of war. We must do all that we can to see that those actions which fall outside the scope of the amnesty and the truth commission are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

Helen Mack, sister of Myrna Mack, who was brutally murdered by a Guatemalan death squad in 1990, is in town this week to discuss the application for amnesty made by her sister's killers. Such crimes do not fall within the parameters of the amnesty law, and we must press the Guatemalan Government to set firm limits on the amnesty provision in such cases.

We must also ensure that the truth commission is given the information that it requires to complete its healing process for the Guatemalan people. This means that the United States Government must fully declassify documents dealing with human rights abuses in Guatemala during the civil war. Given our own shameful role in this conflict, this is the least we can do to support Guatemala's peace process.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I join my colleagues in urging the adoption of House Concurrent Resolution 17 congratulating the people of Guatemala on the success of the recent negotiations to establish a peace process for Guatemala. This is an important statement of congressional support and the people of Guatemala should know of our interest and concern and support for their efforts in the peace process there.

Mr. Speaker, I join in congratulating the people of Guatemala on reaching a peaceful solution to the brutal civil war in which more than 100,000 people were killed over the past 36 years. In the violence, thousands of individ-

uals were tortured, raped, and "disappeared." The frustrating and difficult U.N.-sponsored peace negotiations between the Guatemalan Government and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union [URNG] were not quick, but they have brought an end to the violence.

At the same time, however, I wish to express my serious concerns regarding the sweeping amnesty provisions which were, ironically, dubbed the Law of National Reconciliation. This legislation, which passed the Guatemalan Congress after only 2 days of consideration on December 18, 1996, raises some questions that I wish to call to the attention of my colleagues. If misapplied, the Law of National Reconciliation, which followed the signing of the Peace Accords in Madrid on December 12, 1996, will not reconcile the people of Guatemala with government forces, but will plant the seeds of future suspicion and mistrust between the Guatemalan people and members of government agencies. I am concerned that the amnesty provisions could be used to open up a legal back door for human rights perpetrators to escape just prosecution.

The broad amnesty provisions are also in direct conflict with the March 1994 Human Rights Accord, one of the proclaimed milestones in the Guatemalan peace process. This accord required both sides to agree that the government would not sponsor measures designed to prevent prosecution of human rights violations. I urge the Guatemalan authorities at least to apply the minimum safeguards in the Law of National Reconciliation when prosecuting human rights violations. While providing amnesty for political crimes related to the armed civil war, article 8 of this law excludes cases of genocide, torture, and forced disappearances from the amnesty, as well as crimes for which amnesty is prohibited by Guatemalan law or Guatemala's international treaty obligations.

I am also concerned, Mr. Speaker, with regard to civil cases in which U.S. citizens are involved, which are not connected with the armed conflict. The Law of National Reconciliation could potentially be used to terminate the landmark cases brought against Guatemalan Government forces by U.S. citizens Helen Mack, sister of the slain Myrna Mack; Jennifer Harbury, the wife of Mr. Bamaca; Carole Denn, wife of Michael DeVine; and Sister Diana Ortiz. In addition, those few members of the military who have already been convicted in the DeVine and Mack cases could be released from prison. I hope the Guatemalan legal authorities will insure that all human rights perpetrators in Guatemala are brought to justice, and none of these cases will be terminated or suspended under the amnesty provisions.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this resolution today, but I also urge the Guatemalan Government to be certain that human rights violators are sought out and punished to the fullest extent of the law.

Mr. HAMILTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. EWING). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New York [Mr. GILMAN] that the House suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 17).

The question was taken.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 5 of rule I and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks on the resolution just considered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

CONGRATULATING PEOPLE OF NICARAGUA ON DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS SUCCESS

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 18) congratulating the people of the Republic of Nicaragua on the success of their Democratic elections held on October 20, 1996.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 18

Whereas on October 20, 1996, the people of the Republic of Nicaragua held truly democratic, multiparty elections to choose their government;

Whereas these elections were deemed by international and domestic observers to be free and fair and a legitimate expression of the will of the people of the Republic of Nicaragua;

Whereas on January 10, 1997, Arnaldo Aleman was peacefully sworn in to the office of President of the Republic of Nicaragua and immediately promised to continue down the path to democracy, national reconciliation and reconstruction that are started by the previous administration of President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro; and

Whereas this historic event of democratic elections in the Republic of Nicaragua and the inauguration of President Arnaldo Aleman should be honored: Now, therefore, be it

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

(1) congratulates the people of the Republic of Nicaragua for the successful completion of the historic democratic, multiparty elections held on October 20, 1996;

(2) congratulates former President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro for her personal courage and her commitment to democracy, which have helped her achieve a profound political and economic transition in the Republic of Nicaragua;

(3) encourages all Nicaraguans to work together after taking this critical step on the long road to lasting peace and democracy;

(4) recognizes that all Nicaraguans should continue to work together in order to ensure a stable democracy, respect for human rights, a free and market-oriented economy, and social justice for all people;

(5) reaffirms the commitment of the United States to help the Republic of Nicaragua move toward freedom and democracy; and

(6) further reaffirms that the United States is strongly committed to encouraging democracy and peaceful development throughout the Western Hemisphere.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule the gentleman from