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A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

SENSE OF HOUSE IN SUPPORT OF FREE AND FAIR REFERENDUM ON SELF-DETERMINATION FOR PEOPLE OF WESTERN SAHARA

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 245) expressing the sense of the House of Representatives in support of a free and fair referendum on self-determination for the people of Western Sahara, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. RES. 245

Whereas United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan appointed former United States Secretary of State James Baker III as his Personal Envoy for Western Sahara to end the prevailing referendum stalemate;

Whereas talks between the Kingdom of Morocco and the Front for the Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro (also known as the Polisario Front) mediated by Mr. Baker have achieved agreement on ways to end the referendum stalemate;

Whereas the end of the stalemate over the Western Sahara referendum would allow for the release of civilian political prisoners and prisoners of war held by Morocco and the Polisario Front; and

Whereas the United States supports the holding of a free, fair, and transparent referendum on self-determination for the people of Western Sahara: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) expresses its full support to former United States Secretary of State James Baker III in his mission as Personal Envoy of the United Nations Secretary General for the Western Sahara;

(2) expresses its support for a referendum on self-determination for the people of Western Sahara that should meet the following criteria:

(A) free, fair, and transparent and held in the presence of international and domestic observers and international media without administrative or military pressure or interference;

(B) only genuine Sahrawis, as identified in the method agreed to by both sides, will take part in the referendum voting; and

(C) the result, once certified by the United Nations, is accepted by both sides;

(3) encourages the release of civilian political prisoners and prisoners of war held by Morocco and the Polisario Front at the earliest possible date; and

(4) requests the administration to fully support former United States Secretary of State James Baker III in his mission of organizing a free, fair, and transparent referendum on self-determination for the people of Western Sahara without military or administrative constraints.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California [Mr. ROYCE] and the gentleman from California [Mr. MENENDEZ] each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California [Mr. ROYCE].

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to

revise and extend their remarks on this measure.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

This resolution expresses the support of the House of Representatives for the so-far successful negotiations between the Kingdom of Morocco and the Polisario Front, who have made the tough decision to peacefully work out their differences on the conduct of a referendum on self-determination for Western Sahara. The negotiations have been guided by former Secretary of State James Baker, now serving as the Special Envoy of the U.N. Secretary General for Western Sahara.

Secretary Baker's diplomacy have broken a 6-year stalemate on referendum negotiations. While no date has been set for balloting, we appear to be closer to fair and free referendum for Western Sahara than at any time in the last two decades. This conflict, which has often seemed intractable, has not received the attention it deserves. This is now changing with Secretary Baker's engagement, as well as with the attention that Congress is now paying to this issue.

This resolution not only praises the efforts of Secretary Baker but it puts the House on record as supporting a free, fair, and transparent referendum. At this sensitive point in the process, such a nonpartisan expression of support is valuable. Mr. Baker said in a Washington news conference last week that this resolution provides a much needed boost to a referendum process he referred to as the "last opportunity for peace" in Western Sahara.

Years of fighting between Morocco, the Polisario Front, and Mauritania have claimed thousands of lives and created hundreds of thousands of refugees. The equitable ending of this conflict is important to the United States. Morocco is a longstanding American ally, and continued turmoil in the region is contrary to United States interests.

The breakthrough achieved by Secretary Baker is important. That is why we need to take proper notice of it. It is time to show all parties that the United States is watching and cares. I urge my colleagues to support this balanced resolution as a sign of congressional support for the significant advance that has taken place toward resolving this longstanding conflict.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

(Mr. MENENDEZ asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of House Resolution 245, expressing the sense of the House in support of a free and fair referendum on self-determination for the people of Western Sahara.

Mr. Speaker, I think we owe a great deal of gratitude to former Secretary of State James Baker for his service as Special Envoy. Clearly, it was his intervention which brought an end to the referendum impasse and which has allowed for an opportunity for peace in the region.

For too long, the situation in the Western Sahara has been left unresolved, and for too long it has caused tension in the region and within the African continent. It is crucial at this juncture that the U.S. Government and the Congress put their weight behind the plan negotiated by former Secretary Baker. There is only a small window of opportunity to implement the agreement, which itself remains quite fragile. If we bypass this opportunity by our inattention or if we allow either side to renege on the commitments made in Houston, we will be responsible for foregoing an opportunity for long-term peace in the region. That is not a cost we can afford, and it is a small price to pay for peace and democracy.

The Houston plan has at long last found a resolution which is acceptable to both the Moroccan Government and the Polisario Front. The referendum, which will be held next December, will grant the Sahrawi people their long-awaited right to self-determination, the same right enjoyed by free people throughout the world.

Sahrawi President Abdelaziz has given his word that he will stand by and respect the people's decision regardless of the outcome as long as the referendum is free and fair and allows only Sahrawis to vote. The Sahrawi people have been left in limbo due to political considerations rather than any really legal dispute.

In 1975, the International Court of Justice declared that there is no establishment of any legal ties of territorial sovereignty between the territory of Western Sahara and the Kingdom of Morocco. Now the Sahrawi people will have the opportunity to decide for themselves their political future, be it independence or incorporation into Morocco. It is their choice.

I want to thank the gentleman from California [Mr. ROYCE] for his leadership in bringing the resolution before the House and for sponsoring it. I am proud to be an original cosponsor. And I also want to again congratulate former Secretary Baker for his tremendous efforts. He has been and we expect will continue to be crucial to the success of this ultimate endeavor.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

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Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from New York [Mr. GILMAN], the distinguished chairman of the Committee on International Relations.

(Mr. GILMAN asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the distinguished gentleman from California [Mr. ROYCE], the chairman of our Subcommittee on Africa, for introducing this resolution and for his outstanding leadership on this very difficult issue. The purpose of this resolution is to highlight the significant efforts of former Secretary of State James Baker in advancing a peaceful solution to the question of Western Sahara. Due to the leadership by the gentleman from California [Mr. ROYCE], this resolution has moved forward in a consensus manner. We have worked closely with both sides on the Western Sahara question and with Secretary Baker and all parties find that the resolution is agreeable.

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, I urge our Members to support this excellent resolution.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from New Jersey [Mr. Payne], a member of the Subcommittee on Africa.

Mr. PAYNE. Mr. Speaker, let me first commend the gentleman from California [Mr. ROYCE], the chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa, and the gentleman from New Jersey [Mr. MENENDEZ], the ranking member, for the outstanding work that they have done on this resolution. The Western Sahara has been a point of contention for some time now. The final outcome for this former Spanish colony will be historic and a momentous occasion. It will set a precedent for many other issues of self-determination throughout the world, such as Cyprus and Northern Ireland. This is a major accomplishment. We should commend the former Secretary of State James Baker, the Polisario Front and representatives of Morocco for coming to the table to decide on a referendum on the future of this disputed territory. The referendum originally scheduled for January 1992 is to decide whether Western Sahara should be incorporated into Morocco or become an independent nation as many of the Sahrawi people have fought for for many years. I am glad to see the culmination of the identification process which first started in 1984. I also want to congratulate the Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan for his role in urging negotiations in this region. Let me say that I think that now the playing field has been leveled, where all will have access to the media, to the press, and that international observers will be able to participate in the proceedings. All of these very important issues have been worked out. This is a step in the right direction.

As we see democracy spreading throughout the continent of Africa, where only a few countries are left in dispute at this time, I think that it is good to see another nation coming to the front where the question which has long besieged them and has been a problem may be finally worked out. Once again I urge my colleagues to support this resolution.

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume. In closing, let me commend the gentleman from New Jersey [Mr. MENENDEZ], the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Africa, who has worked with us on this resolution. We have worked together on several measures throughout the year. I would also like to commend Special Envoy James Baker for his work. Morocco is a long-time ally and the United States has been improving relations with Algeria, which supports the Polisario Front.

The issue of self-determination for Western Sahara poses a danger of instability for the northwest African region. The issue must be resolved so that the likelihood of long-term problems there is diminished. Peace in Western Sahara will allow for economic development and democratization in the region and could be a beneficial example for other nations in North Africa and the Middle East. That is the purpose of this resolution.

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

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to adopt the resolution, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LAZIO of New York). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California [Mr. ROYCE] that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, House Resolution 245, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the resolution, as amended, was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

FURTHER MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A further message from the Senate by Mr. Lundregan, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed with amendments in which the concurrence of the House is requested, A bill of the House of the following title:

H.R. 2607. An act making appropriations for the government of the District of Columbia and other activities chargeable in whole or in part against the revenues of said District for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1998, and for other purposes.

The message also announced, that the Senate insists upon its amendments to the bill (H.R. 2607) "An Act making appropriations for the government of the District of Columbia and other activities chargeable in whole or in part against the revenues of said District for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1998, and for the purposes.", requests a conference with the House on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses thereon, and appoints Mr. STEVENS, Mr. SPECTER, Mr. DOMENICI, Mr. MCCONNELL, Mr. SHELBY, Mr. GREGG, Mr. BENNETT, Mr. CAMPBELL, Mr. FAIRCLOTH, Mrs. HUTCHISON, Mr. COCHRAN, Mr. BYRD, Mr. INOUE, Mr. HOLLINGS, Mr. LEAHY, Mr. BUMPERS, Mr. LAUTENBERG, Mr. HARKIN, Ms. MIKULSKI, Mrs. MURRAY, and Mrs. BOXER, to be the conferees on the part of the Senate.

EXPRESSING CONCERN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFGHANISTAN

Mr. ROHRBACHER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 156) expressing concern for the continued deterioration of human rights in Afghanistan and emphasizing the need for a peaceful political settlement in that country, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 156

Whereas Congress recognizes that the legacy of civil conflict in Afghanistan during the last 17 years has had a devastating effect on the civilian population in that country, killing 2,000,000 people and displacing more than 7,000,000, and has had a particularly negative impact on the rights and security of women and girls;

Whereas the Department of State's Country Reports on Human Practices for 1996 states: "Serious human rights violations continue to occur [. . .] political killings, torture, rape, arbitrary detention, looting, abductions and kidnappings for ransom were committed by armed units, local commanders and rogue individuals.";

Whereas the Afghan combatants are responsible for numerous abhorrent human rights abuses, including the rape, sexual abuse, torture, abduction, and persecution of women and girls;

Whereas drug proliferation has increased in Afghanistan;

Whereas Congress is disturbed by the upsurge of reported human rights abuses in Afghanistan, including extreme restrictions placed on women and girls;

Whereas safe haven has been provided to suspected terrorists and terrorist camps may be allowed to operate in Afghanistan;

Whereas Afghanistan is a sovereign nation and must work to solve its internal disputes; and

Whereas Afghanistan and the United States recognize international human rights conventions, such as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which espouse respect for basic human rights of all individuals without regard to race, religion, ethnicity, or gender: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring).

SECTION 1. DECLARATION OF POLICY.

The Congress hereby—

(1) deplors the violations of international humanitarian law in Afghanistan and raises concern over the reported cases of stoning, public executions, and street beatings;

(2) condemns the targeted discrimination against women and girls and expresses deep concern regarding the prohibition of employment and education for women and girls;

(3) urges the Taliban and all other parties in Afghanistan to cease providing safe haven to suspected terrorists or permitting Afghan territory to be used for terrorist training; and

(4) takes note of the continued armed conflict in Afghanistan, affirms the need for peace negotiations and expresses hope that the Afghan parties will agree to a cease-fire throughout the country.

SEC. 2. SENSE OF THE CONGRESS.

It is the sense of Congress that the President—

(1) should continue to monitor the human rights situation in Afghanistan and should call for adherence by all factions in Afghanistan to international humanitarian law;

(2) should call for an end to the systematic discrimination and harassment of women and girls in Afghanistan;

(3) should encourage efforts to procure a durable peace in Afghanistan and should support the efforts of the United Nations Special Envoy Secretary General Lakhdar