

Ms. WATSON. Madam Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATSON) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 208, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the resolution, as amended, was agreed to.

The title was amended so as to read: "Resolution recognizing the 25th anniversary of the founding of Operation Smile."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

COMMENDING THE KINGDOM OF LESOTHO FOR ENACTMENT OF A LAW TO IMPROVE THE STATUS OF MARRIED WOMEN

Ms. WATSON. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 294) commending the Kingdom of Lesotho, on the occasion of International Women's Day, for the enactment of a law to improve the status of married women and ensure the access of married women to property rights, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 294

Whereas the Kingdom of Lesotho is a parliamentary constitutional monarchy that has been an independent country since 1966;

Whereas Lesotho is a low-income country with a gross national income per capita of \$960 and 50 percent of the population lives below the poverty line;

Whereas, in Lesotho, the HIV prevalence is estimated at 23 percent for the total adult population and 56 percent for pregnant women between the ages of 25 and 29, and the current average life expectancy at birth is estimated to be 34.4 years;

Whereas the Kingdom of Lesotho, referred to by some as the "Kingdom in the Sky", was a strong public supporter of the end of apartheid in South Africa, and the Government of Lesotho granted political asylum to a number of refugees from South Africa during the apartheid era;

Whereas the Government of Lesotho has demonstrated a strong commitment to ruling justly, investing in people, ensuring economic freedom, and controlling corruption;

Whereas the Government of Lesotho has been named eligible by the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) for a Compact of financial assistance that, as currently proposed, would strongly focus on improving and safeguarding the health of the people of Lesotho, in addition to supporting projects for sustainable water resource management and private sector development;

Whereas, historically, a married woman in Lesotho was considered a legal minor during the lifetime of her husband, was severely restricted in economic activities, was unable to enter into legally binding contracts without her husband's consent, and had no standing in civil court;

Whereas legislation elevating the legal status of married women and providing property and inheritance rights to women in Lesotho was introduced as early as 1992;

Whereas for years women's groups, non-governmental organizations, the Federation of Women Lawyers, officials of the Government of Lesotho, and others in Lesotho have pushed for passage of legislation strengthening rights of married women;

Whereas in a letter to the Government of Lesotho in September 2006, the chief executive officer of the MCC stated that gender inequality is a constraint on economic growth and poverty reduction and is related to the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, and that inattention to issues of gender inequality could undermine the potential impact of the Compact proposed to be entered into between the MCC and the Government of Lesotho;

Whereas the MCC's advocacy of gender equity played a supportive role in the enactment of the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act in the Kingdom of Lesotho, which effectively eliminated "de jure" discrimination against women in the customary law system;

Whereas the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act was passed by the Parliament of Lesotho and enacted into law in November 2006;

Whereas the MCC has already provided assistance to further full and meaningful implementation of the new law; and

Whereas the MCC has promulgated and is currently implementing a new gender policy to integrate gender into all phases of the development and implementation of the Compact between the MCC and the Government of Lesotho: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) applauds the enactment of the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act by the Kingdom of Lesotho;

(2) lauds the Kingdom of Lesotho for demonstrating its commitment to improve gender equity;

(3) encourages the Kingdom of Lesotho to continue its effort to ensure gender equity; and

(4) commends the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) for developing and implementing policies to advance gender equity in the Kingdom of Lesotho and other countries eligible for financial assistance from the MCC.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATSON) and the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROSLEHTINEN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. WATSON. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the resolution under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

Ms. WATSON. Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of this resolution, and I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

H. Res. 294, as amended, commends the government of Lesotho for changing its laws to effectively eliminate legal discrimination against women in Lesotho's legal system.

In many parts of the world, women's rights are extremely limited, or barely exist, compared to the rights of men.

While women and girls constitute 51 percent of the world's population and make up 70 percent of all agricultural workers, they continue to suffer more from poverty, chronic hunger, HIV/AIDS, and lack of access to education. Women often constitute the highest percentage of those dispossessed of their land, disadvantaged by customary law and traditions which privilege men. Women are often subject to discriminatory laws that restrict their civil, economic and property rights.

Until the passage of this law in Lesotho, women were defined as legal in Lesotho after marriage. Lesotho women had no rights to enter into economic transactions without the consent of their husbands. They could not purchase or inherit property and had no standing in the courts.

Customary law in Lesotho ensured that property belonged to the husband, or was entrusted to a male relative. In many instances, after the death of a parent or spouse, or in the event of a divorce or after an out-of-court settlement, many married women got nothing other than their personal effects.

In November of 2006, His Majesty King Letsie III and the government of Lesotho took a major step towards correcting this grave injustice against women citizens by enacting the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act, giving Lesotho women many of the rights they have long been denied.

If faithfully implemented, the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act will be an important vehicle for gender equality in Lesotho. It will certainly go a long way towards reducing the risk of women, particularly widows, divorcees and their children from falling into extreme poverty, which will increase their risk of exposure to the HIV/AIDS pandemic which has devastated the country's poorest population.

In a country where nearly 25 percent of adults are infected with HIV/AIDS and the life expectancy of women is 44 years, this new law is crucial to removing barriers to access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services for women and girls.

There is still progress that needs to be made on gender equity in Lesotho. According to the State Department, "a woman married under customary law has no standing in civil court. Under the country's dual legal system, marriages which occur under customary law must be legalized in the civil system to have legal standing."

But I believe the efforts of the government of Lesotho are showing real progress in the area of promoting equal rights for women, and I believe it's our responsibility to acknowledge the efforts of those people seeking to empower individuals from all walks of society. As right and overdue as it might be to make these changes, that does not make them easy changes in a society that has done things a certain way for so long a time. Hence, if we wish to see more political leaders around the

world stand up and make the effort to change their societies for the better, we should be making as much of an effort here to support those efforts.

The actions of the Lesotho government, to guarantee equity for women under the law, will serve as an important model for other African Nations in addressing their national health and poverty challenges, and I look forward to the replication of this law across the continent of Africa.

And that is why this resolution also acknowledges another factor in making this change to empower the women of Lesotho.

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It was through the work of the Millennium Challenge Corporation that we were able to encourage the best instincts of Lesotho's political leadership to make these changes into law. It is instructive to pay attention to how the MCC's leadership convinced Lesotho to make these changes.

They did not demand a change as a quid pro quo for MCC assistance. Instead, they appealed to the Lesotho Government's sense of reason, by convincing them that any assistance provided by the United States for economic development would be only half as effective if half of Lesotho's population was excluded from the formal economy.

I know we have had some concerns here in Congress about the MCC and its effectiveness, and I think it's important for us to look very carefully at the MCC and our entire U.S. foreign assistance delivery system, because I fear there has been a dreadful lack of effective leadership over this avowed pillar of U.S. foreign policy.

But I think there are a great deal of positive lessons to draw from the success of the MCC, and I hope we can support the MCC as it works to strengthen and expand its efforts.

I think the MCC's concept and directions are promising, and I hope the MCC's future efforts will bring more opportunities to introduce resolutions such as this one, and I am really proud to have presented this resolution, because that was one of the locations that I was asked to go to as an ambassador. Instead, I went to Micronesia, so I am really, really interested in how they make progress, and particularly how they empower their women. I urge all my colleagues to do the same and support this resolution.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I would like to thank my colleague from California, Ambassador Watson, for introducing this important resolution, House Resolution 294, which commends the Kingdom of Lesotho for enacting a law to improve the legal status of married women.

Historically, a married woman in this African country was considered a

minor under the law, and, as such, was unable to enter into contracts without her husband's consent and was severely restricted in economic activities and had no legal standing in the courts. This was the case, despite that women have traditionally borne a disproportionate share of responsibility for the health, the welfare, and the education of the family in Lesotho.

They are in the fields, in the markets, in the classrooms, and in the clinics. They run the home and provide the food, care and education essential for the survival of their families. Women serve as the backbone of society in Lesotho. Yet under the law, they have been considered only half a person.

Obviously, this was a grave social injustice that required remedy. I commend those in the government and in civil society who began pressing for greater gender equality in Lesotho as early as 1992.

But it is important to realize that gender inequality in Lesotho, and throughout Africa, is not just an issue of human rights. This is a development issue and an issue of national security.

Over half of the population lives below the poverty level. Yet a government cannot responsibly expect to lift its people out of poverty while legally excluding half of the most productive segment of society from the economy.

Further, at 29 percent, Lesotho has one of the highest HIV prevalence rates in the world. Life expectancy already has plummeted to 36 years, and prevalence rates are expected to climb to a staggering 36 percent in the next 15 years.

The HIV pandemic is obliterating a generation of the most productive people in Africa. In South Africa, for example, factory managers routinely complain that they have to hire two people to fill a single position due to absentee rates related to HIV.

When a man dies, who is left to provide for his family? His wife. But if a wife and a mother cannot secure even basic inheritance rights and has no standing in civil court, then how is she to provide for the next generation? The traditional safety net provided by the extended family has been eroded, and coping mechanisms have been exhausted by the HIV pandemic.

Women whose husbands have died are suspected to carry the virus themselves and are often shunned by their extended families and communities. Thus, high death rates associated with HIV/AIDS and gender inequalities are leaving behind a generation of impoverished, disaffected youth who are susceptible to criminal activities and radical acts.

In recognition of the links between gender inequality, poverty and HIV/AIDS, the Millennium Challenge Corporation made gender issues a high priority in its negotiations with Lesotho.

In a letter to the Government of Lesotho, the CEO of MCC asserted that the potential impact of a development compact between Lesotho and the MCC

focusing on public health and sustainable water and private sector development would be undermined if the issues of gender inequality were not addressed.

Shortly thereafter, the Parliament passed the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act, which has significantly enhanced the legal standing of women in Lesotho. To its credit, the MCC has provided assistance to support meaningful implementation of the act.

I strongly encourage the government of Lesotho to continue demonstrating its commitment to improving gender equality in the interest of human rights, economic development, and national security. I hope that other countries in the region will follow suit.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Madam Speaker, I rise in support of H. Res. 294, commending the Kingdom of Lesotho, on the occasion of International Women's Day, for the enactment of a law to improve the status of married women and ensure the access of married women to property rights.

Let my first begin by thanking my distinguished colleague on the House Foreign Affairs Committee and a member of its subcommittee on Africa and the Global Health, Congresswoman WATSON, for recognizing this issue and introducing this vital resolution. It is important that we recognize and commend the role and the efforts that the Government of Lesotho has taken to further gender equity. International Women's Day, observed on March 8, 2007, calls for people to recognize the accomplishments of women, while reaffirming their commitment to continue the struggle for equality, justice, and peace. This is a milestone that demands worldwide recognition, and I applaud our United States Congress for taking this role.

The Kingdom of Lesotho is a parliamentary constitutional monarchy that has been an independent country since 1966. Often referred to as the "Kingdom in the Sky," Lesotho was a strong public supporter of ending apartheid in South Africa, and was known for granting political asylum to numerous refugees during that era. Lesotho is a low-income country with a gross national income per capita of \$960, and 50 percent of its people live below the poverty line. However, its Government has demonstrated a strong commitment to ruling justly, investing in its people, ensuring economic freedom, as well as controlling corruption.

Madam Speaker, in the Kingdom of Lesotho, a married woman would historically be considered a legal minor during the lifetime of her husband. Such status would severely restrict her economic activities, forbid her from entering into legally binding contracts without her husband's consent, and hamper her ability to have standing in civil court. As early as 1992, legislation aimed at elevating the legal status of married women and providing property and inheritance rights to women in Lesotho was introduced. Since then, women's groups, nongovernmental organizations, the Federation of Women Lawyers, Lesotho Government officials, and many others have continually pushed for the passage of legislations which would strengthen their rights.

As a strong advocate of women's rights, it has continually been my role to denounce human rights violations against women, as

well as fight for gender equity. I must certainly agree with the Chief Executive Officer of the MCC, who stated that "gender inequality is a constraint on economic growth and poverty reduction and is related to the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, and that inattention to issues of gender inequality could undermine the potential impact of the Compact proposed to be entered into between the MCC and the Government of Lesotho."

Madam Speaker, the MCC is currently implementing a new gender policy to integrate gender into all phases of the development and implementation of the Compact between the MCC and the Government of Lesotho. It is now the responsibility of the United States House of Representatives to support the goals of Lesotho's International Women's Day, commend them on their strong commitment to improving gender equity, as well as applaud their enactment of the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act.

Lesotho's actions aimed at guaranteeing equity for women under the law ought to serve as a model for many other African nations, where women have been subjected to discriminatory laws in the areas of civil, economic, and property rights. This resolution will certainly go a long way in reducing the risk of women and their children falling into extreme poverty, eventually reducing their risk of exposure to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. I ask my colleagues to support this measure. Let us continue to encourage the Kingdom of Lesotho in its ongoing efforts to ensure gender equity. Let us commend the Millennium Challenge Corporation for developing and implementing policies to advance gender equity.

I thank you once again, Congresswoman WATSON, for your efforts in introducing this piece of legislation.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Madam Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. WATSON. Madam Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATSON) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 294, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the resolution, as amended, was agreed to.

The title was amended so as to read: "A resolution commending the Kingdom of Lesotho for the enactment of a law to improve the status of married women and ensure the access of married women to property rights."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

HONORING WORLD RED CROSS RED CRESCENT DAY

Ms. WATSON. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 378) honoring World Red Cross Red Crescent Day, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 378

Whereas World Red Cross Red Crescent Day was observed on May 8, 2007;

Whereas May 8 marks the birth of Henry Dunant, the founder of the International Committee of the Red Cross, who began advocating for the humane treatment of the wartime sick and wounded after witnessing the atrocities at the Battle of Solferino in 1859;

Whereas World Red Cross Red Crescent Day is celebrated by many of the 185 Red Cross, Red Crescent, and Magen David Adom National Societies throughout the world and more than 750 chapters throughout the United States;

Whereas through the motivation and action of its volunteers and donors, the American Red Cross and its partners worldwide pay tribute to Henry Dunant's legacy by helping those in need and protecting human dignity for all;

Whereas the American Red Cross helps vulnerable people and communities around the world to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters, complex humanitarian emergencies, and life-threatening health conditions;

Whereas the American Red Cross is uniquely positioned to save lives through the Red Cross, Red Crescent, and Magen David Adom National Societies network of 97,000,000 volunteers located in nearly every country in the world;

Whereas in 2006, the American Red Cross responded to 23 international disasters, contributing more than \$16.1 million in financial support, deploying delegates and providing relief supplies and other emergency assistance to millions affected by disasters;

Whereas the American Red Cross continues to help affected communities recover from the tsunami that resulted from the earthquake that occurred off the west coast of northern Sumatra, Indonesia, on December 26, 2004, by providing assistance to more than 3.3 million people through long-term recovery programs and more than 80 million people through disease control activities in the tsunami-affected countries;

Whereas since 2001, the American Red Cross and its partners in the Measles Initiative have vaccinated more than 372 million children in 48 countries against measles; and

Whereas World Red Cross Red Crescent Day will honor the efforts of Red Cross, Red Crescent, and Magen David Adom employees and volunteers who work tirelessly to alleviate human suffering: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives commends the humanitarian efforts of Red Cross, Red Crescent, and Magen David Adom National Societies worldwide on the occasion of World Red Cross Red Crescent Day.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATSON) and the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) each will control 20 minutes. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. WATSON. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent for all Members to have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the resolution under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

Ms. WATSON. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of this resolution.

I would first like to commend our distinguished colleague, Mr. FORTUÑO of Puerto Rico, for introducing this resolution.

More than 140 years ago, the great Henry Dunant founded the International Committee of the Red Cross after witnessing the atrocities of the Battle of Solferino in 1859.

Mr. Dunant's heroic advocacy on behalf of the humane treatment of wartime sick and wounded spawned a global movement dedicated to helping those in need and protecting human dignity for all.

Today, there are more than 185 Red Cross, Red Crescent and Magen David Adom societies throughout the world and more than 750 chapters in the United States alone. These organizations help vulnerable people in communities prevent, prepare for and respond to and recover from disasters, complex humanitarian emergencies and life-threatening conditions. The red symbols of these great organizations are unambiguous, internationally recognized, signs of comfort, hope and protection.

The American Red Cross, in particular, is a vital lifeline for many people, both in this country and abroad. In conjunction with its sister national societies throughout the world, it has assisted millions of distressed individuals.

In 2006 alone, the American Red Cross responded to 23 international disasters and contributed more than \$16.1 million in financial support. Often beyond the lens of cameras or public view at some of the most devastated corners on Earth, the American Red Cross represents our country and our national spirit of generosity and hope.

To honor Mr. Dunant's legacy and the work of thousands of volunteers and donors, the American Red Cross and its partners will celebrate World Red Cross Red Crescent Day. This resolution pays tribute to this event and to the work of thousands of volunteers internationally. It reaffirms our country's support for the world's largest humanitarian network and celebrates the values of the Red Cross, the Red Crescent, and Magen David Adom societies.

I am pleased to note that for the first time World Red Cross Red Crescent day will include Magen David Adom, Israel's national Red Cross society, which became a full member of the international movement in 2006.

I strongly support this resolution and urge my colleagues to do the same.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of House Resolution 378 introduced by my good friend and colleague from Puerto Rico (Mr. FORTUÑO).

This resolution commends the humanitarian efforts of Red Cross, Red Crescent and Magen David Adom societies worldwide on the occasion of World Red Cross Red Crescent Day.