Mr.

Speaker, I yield myself such time as I

may consume. I want to thank the

leadership for bringing up this resolution.

H. Con. Res. 18, Mr. Speaker, addresses

the continued gross violations of

human rights committed by the Syrian

regime. The terrorist regime in Damascus

is one that not only supports and

facilitates terrorist attacks against innocent

civilians throughout the world

but also engages in a widespread campaign

of terror and human rights suppression

among its own people.

According to the most recent State

Department Country Reports on

Human Rights Practices, the government

of Syria continues to commit numerous

serious abuses and remains

with a poor record on human rights

overall. Any activity by human rights

activists and organizations is stifled

and activists are sentenced to lengthy

prison terms, tortured or even forced

into exile, only to be harassed and intimidated

in exile as well.

Domestic human rights groups cannot

exist legally. According to a recent

world report by Human Rights Watch,

the dictatorship of Syria strictly limits

freedom of expression, association and

assembly and treats ethnic minority

Kurds as second-class citizens. The

government has a long record of arbitrary

arrests, systematic torture, prolonged

detention of suspects and grossly

unfair trials. Women face discrimination

and have little means for full

redress when they become victims of

rape or domestic violence.

However, Syria’s deplorable human

rights record is not limited to its immediate

borders. The repressive apparatus

also extends into neighboring

Lebanon, which has been a captive nation

for 25 years. Hundreds of freethinking

Lebanese civilians are believed

to have been killed or disappeared

because of Syrian occupation

forces throughout these years. U.S.

policy must support the Syrian people.

It must support its dissidents, human

rights activists, and the pro-democracy

advocates so that they, too, can free

themselves from the shackles of tyrannical

rule.

This resolution also addresses, Mr.

Speaker, two overarching vital U.S. national

security requirements regarding

the Syrian regime; that is, that Syria

must immediately and unconditionally

cease its support for terrorism and its

development of unconventional weapons

and advanced missile capabilities.

I strongly urge my colleagues to support

this important resolution to express

U.S. support for those in Syria

and Lebanon who continue to toil for

freedom and democracy, and ensure the

regime in Damascus that we will continue

to increase the pressure until

these goals are met.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of

my time.