Mr. Speaker, I rise

today to stand shoulder to shoulder

with the legitimate aims of Syrian people

in their quest for freedom and democracy.

Ever since the Syrian people rose up

to demand their rights and dignity

from the Assad regime, they have faced

brutal repression. Their nonviolent

protest movement has been met with

repressive force, and this has been a

disgrace on the world scene.

The human rights abuses of the

Assad regime are unthinkable, and

they are historic and generational. It is

torturing its own people at this time,

including even children.

I was shocked and outraged by the

story of Hamza al-Khatib. He was a 13-

year-old boy who was killed and tortured

and his body was returned to his

family on May 25 with clear signs of

torture and brutality. He had a broken

hand; his genitals were cut off and severed.

This young man, only 13 years

old, will never see his family again because

he has gone on.

But what happened to him the Syrian

people can’t forget, and his example

has inspired people to stand up for democracy.

Over the past 3 months, a familiar

pattern has emerged. People organize

public demonstrations to demand

their God-given rights. Inevitably,

the government forces overreact

and kill peaceful protesters. Funerals

for the deceased garner even larger

demonstrations, which are then repressed

ever more brutally by the government.

The emergency situation in Syria

today reached a new level when tanks

rolled into Daraa. Since that time,

hundreds of peaceful demonstrators

have been killed. Just this morning,

this very morning, Syrian forces killed

15 people when they shelled the town of

Rastan. Fifty-eight people have been

killed there in the past 3 days alone.

Over a thousand have been killed since

democracy protests began.

Mr. Speaker, it’s truly unfortunate

that the Assad regime missed the historic

opportunity that it had right before

it to set a new pattern in the Arab

Spring, a pattern that above all respects

human rights. Instead, it chose

to become an enemy of its own people.

By murdering its own people and violating

their fundamental right to security

and liberty, the Assad regime has

lost any and all legitimacy to govern.

Legitimacy is gained through the consent

of the governed, not brutal repressive

crackdowns, jailings, and torturing.

While we don’t know yet how events

will ultimately unfold in Syria, I want

to commend the activism of Syrian

Americans. Syrian Americans are

doing everything they can to support

their friends and their families. For example,

just last week the Syrian American

Council organized a day of action

to support freedom and democracy in

Syria. Some 400-plus Syrian Americans

came all across the country to come to

Washington, D.C., to lobby their Representatives

in Congress, to demonstrate

at the Syrian Embassy, and to

organize committees to plan future initiatives.

That’s how democracy works, Mr.

Speaker; people coming together with

their common concerns to peaceably

petition their government. That’s what

makes America great, and that’s what

sets us apart from places like Syria

under the Assad regime. Syria could be

a great bastion of liberty, but not with

this illegitimate regime.

I stand with the patriotic Americans

in steadfast opposition to the grotesque

human rights abuses of the

Assad regime and once and for all call

upon it to respect the rights, dignity,

and democratic aspirations of its people.

The world will not forget Hamza

al-Khatib, Mr. Speaker. We won’t forget

the legitimate yearnings for liberty

and justice from the people of Syria or

anywhere in the world.