Thank you, Mr. Chairman and member of the committee

for having us. I want to echo Jeff’s appreciation for giving

us an opportunity to speak to these issues which we feel so deeply

about. These are two countries, Iran and Syria, that are violating

every important international human rights standard.

The things that you on the panel describe, the various abuses,

are things that we see, we agree with, and the question is now how

to move forward.

I want to just take a minute and highlight one aspect of the situation

in Syria, and that’s the treatment of young people, of children.

This set of demonstrations began in March in the southern

city of Dara’a when security forces fired upon those calling for the

release of children who had been detained for weeks simply for

writing political graffiti on the walls. The regime responded with

its usual methods, using gunfire, arrest, torture, abuse to kill and

intimidate the protestors.

Again, in the past several weeks we have seen the attacks

against children continuing, including a 13-year-old named Hamza

al-Khateeb, who was tortured and mutilated and his body was returned

by Syrian security forces. A 10-year-old boy, a 4-year-old

girl were killed during raids on several towns around Homs. And

on July 15th a 12-year-old, Tallha Dalal, was shot in the head by

police officers in Damascus.

Horrific images of these bodies and those of other children have

been smuggled out. Those responsible for these and other atrocities

must be held accountable for their crimes.

We have gone into lots of detail in the written testimony. You

can read that. But we have no doubt, as you say, that at least

1,600 Syrians have been killed, over 10,000 are now jailed. Security

forces continue to hold people hostage to a widening crack down.

And yet incredibly the people of Syria have lost their fear. The

demonstrations are continuing. They are expanding. And as we

have said repeatedly, President Assad has lost legitimacy, and he

needs and will be held accountable for his actions.

With respect to Iran, as my colleague, Assistant Secretary

Feltman spelled out, we also are regularly reviewing the record of

the government. We know how outrageous they have been and continue

to be. They carry out, as Chairman Chabot, you pointed out,

we think 190 executions this year, which is more than any country

in the world except for China.

The government also continues to impose draconian restrictions

on speech. Journalists and bloggers are targeted as are teachers,

trade unionists and others. The list of abuse goes on and on.

Now, particularly troubling to us is the deep persecution of religious

minorities. On May 1st the Revolutionary Court in the northern

city of Bandar-e Anzali tried 11 Christians who were members

of the Church of Iran, including the pastor of that church. We have

seen this persecution not only against Christians but Sufis and the

Baha’i. And I want to single out the Baha’i because they have been

attacked repeatedly throughout the years.

The United States has imposed sanctions against both of these

governments. But we start from the premise, and I think this may

be where our approach is not understood as well as it should be.

We start from the premise that in both of these countries there is

a courageous populous, a courageous group of people who are challenging

these repressive governments, and our support needs to be

rooted in the assumption that change will occur from within both

of these countries.

And we are doing a range of things both to support their ability

to communicate among themselves and the world. We have extensive

Internet freedom program. We have translated our materials

into Arabic and Farsi. We are working to support non-governmental

organizations who in both countries are severely persecuted.

We are providing training to people. We are providing

ability for them to organize and meet among themselves.

Our belief is that these two governments, these two regimes cannot

stand the test of time because their own people are going to

be ultimately successful in bringing about sustainable democracy

and human rights.

Thank you.

I would just add to that. You know, I am very focused

having worked 30 years in the human rights movement. I

know the importance of our working with civil society, with human

rights activists, the people that are standing on the street and risking

their lives every day. And preparing for the moment when the

transition does come, does occur and allowing us to go forward to

create, to help support a democratic transition, that is the focus for

us.

We are listening to people on the ground. Ambassador Ford 2

weeks ago or 3 weeks ago when he went to Hama was greeted as

a hero because we were standing in solidarity with the people on

the street. When he went back to his Embassy, our Embassy in Damascus,

government supported thugs attacked the Embassy.

That tells you—that gives me a sense that we are doing the right

thing and we are going about this in a way that reinforces those

who are on the front line. That is what this is about. There is no

doubt for the people standing in the streets in many now Syrian

cities, that we are on their side.

. Congressman, I share your sense of urgency and

outrage. I don’t think it is right or fair to say that we are standing

still and hedging our bets. If we want to hedge our bets with a government

we don’t call them barbaric. We don’t constantly on a

daily basis talk about the reprehensible——

Well, there is more than names. This is a—we are

extremely focused. I am focused. Jeff is——

What we are saying is——

No. We are saying at this moment that we are

standing behind the Syrian people and their demand for political

change. This is about them. It is not about us.

No, it is not because it is backed by action. And the

action is an American Ambassador who takes the risk of going out

and standing in the street in Hama.

And appreciated by the people who were standing

there. It is our activity, supporting the ability of the opposition to

meet, to meet in Turkey, to meet inside the country. It is our effort

to try to give them the tools to be ready for the day when change

will occur. And it will occur.

All of those things are part of a strategy and the

strategy, not unlike what you are saying, is the expectation, the realization

that President Assad has lost——

His legitimacy.

. You know, realistically, the opposition in Syria is a

very multiple—multifaceted group. They don’t have one opinion. I

think it is overwhelmingly the case, though, that people that are

risking their lives, who are out on the streets, recognize that we

are trying to amplify their voices. We are trying to provide protection.

Ambassador Ford is every day talking to relatives, talking to people

who are on the receiving end of violence and trying to advocate

on their behalf. They understand this litany of things that we have

said suggest—don’t just suggest. They say very strongly this government

has lost legitimacy. We are standing with the people that

are in the street.

Congressman, I spend a good part of my day in internal

debates and discussions within the State Department about

the use of language in public statements. When we say not only

that he has lost, President Assad has lost legitimacy, is not

indispensible, when we say that he has placed himself and his regime

on the wrong side of history, when we call him barbaric, when

we say his conduct is reprehensible, in the world in which I live

that is about as strong language as I get. And it is the language

that says we have absolutely lost faith in this government.

We are moving in a very deliberate way to support the will of

the Syrian people who are out on the street. I am very comfortable

with the fact that at this moment that the United States Government

is doing what it can and should, positioning ourselves to help

a democratic transition in Syria. That is the message we are conveying

here. And I think it is the message the people of Syria understand

full well, and they are appreciative of it.

Well, to go back to what I said earlier, I don’t think

there is any ambiguity about the extent to which we have condemned

the violence. We have condemned it in broad strokes, barbaric,

reprehensible. And we have condemned it in detail. We have

condemned it at the level of the President and the Secretary of

State, and we have condemned it throughout our Government. So

there is no doubt about the facts and our understanding of those

facts.

I think if you are standing on the streets of Hama

there is no doubt that the United States Government has been on

the side of the people helping both amplify their voices, protecting

them. That is what Ambassador Ford was doing. He was protecting

people who were facing down guns and who were likely on that Friday

to be shot at. His presence there made a difference.

When the families of victims, families of people who have disappeared,

families of people who are being tortured come into the

Embassy, they understand that the United States Government is

trying to help alleviate their pain and their suffering.

That is really what this is about.

You know, and I appreciate that.

And we appreciate the fact that you are having this

hearing. I think it serves the interests that we both share, which

is a move for change.

As in many countries where there has been a lack

of political space to operate, the status of the opposition is fragmented

and diffuse. There are very few opportunities for them to

exercise their political muscles. But they are, I would say, increasingly

frustrated. Obviously frustrated by a government that is repressive

in every way, a government that allows them little space

to speak freely, to get out into the streets, to meet privately even

to discuss political issues.

Well, we are doing several things. I mean one of the

things that I am very involved in, and Congress has been very supportive

of this, to build capacity for people using the new tools of

technology, the Internet and social media to communicate with

each. Again, in a place where you are not allowed to go to the

street and where government has security forces at every corner,

it is very important for people to be able to communicate.

We have got a very aggressive Internet freedom program that includes

wide translation of materials into Farsi, training of activists

both on how to use the technology, but also how to protect themselves

from a government that spends a lot of time and money trying

to disrupt their ability to communicate and makes it dangerous.

We are working also constantly to try to allow Iranian groups to

communicate in and out of the country, to meet, to gather, to begin

to think about what is Iran going to look like after this nightmare

ends? And we are very, very focused.

And he called him in because of the seriousness of these charges

and made it clear that this is not behavior, these allegations demonstrate

behavior that is not behooving of diplomatic status here.

It was to the charge, by the way——Let me answer that. I think there are three aspects

to what we are doing. One, we are providing support, both through

the new social media but also support to civil society activists. We

don’t, you know, put lists on the rooftop, but we are certainly mindful

of the variety of democrats, democratic forces in Iran. And we

are supporting them in a range of ways.

Secondly, we are extremely outspoken, and this includes the

President and the Secretary of State. I think we have made more

public statements about Iran than any other country. And those

statements continue including with this hearing, and again, we appreciate

that.

The third aspect which we haven’t talked about is that we have

really ramped up our efforts not only to impose sanctions, which

we have done against key leaders, but against—but also to bring

others along. And we are starting to succeed at that.

We led an effort at the U.N. Human Rights Council to have a

special expert, a rapporteur appointed several months ago. The

United States is taking a lead in a range of diplomatic fora and we

will continue to do so to isolate Iran and to make clear that not

only we but our allies need to be part of this effort.

So it is a combination of support for the activists, public commentary

and work at the United Nations.

. You know, Congressman, I listened carefully to your

list and we will go back and look at each of the things you raise.

And I will make a commitment that we are going have the conversation

about each of them and see if—what more we can do. As

Jeff said, as Assistant Secretary Feltman said, you know, virtually

every senior Syrian official has now subject to sanctions and so you

are suggesting there are other things we can do. We will look at

them and see if there are ways to ratchet it up.

Mr. Rohrabacher is recognized for 5 minutes.

My view is, and I am quite involved in a set of conversations

with the Chinese authorities about prison conditions,

about recent arrests that have happened since the beginning of the

year, about restrictions on religious freedom, about a whole range

of problems relating to treatment of workers.

Yes.

Let me respond to that. That was a year ago when we——

Did that bilateral discussion on human

rights. The issue of Arizona was raised not on the merits. It was

raised to say by a range of our Government officials, including a

Supreme Court judge, that when we have a controversial issue like

immigration, we debate it openly. People file lawsuits. Lawyers

aren’t disbarred for that.

. No, it is a controversial issue but it is one that I

am very proud of the fact that we debate openly. Newspapers report

on it. Editorial writers speak their mind, and people don’t go

to jail for that. And that we were making the contrast with what

happens in China where dissidents, people who criticize the government,

are punished for their activities.

That was the point of that discussion. We never got into the details

or the merits of our internal debate about that.

. No. It was raised by several people. We did not

have a substantive discussion of that subject. I am a believe, Congressman,

that the United States is and has always been a leader

in the field of human rights.

. We believe in universal human rights. We helped

to create the framework at the United Nations of the Universal

Declaration. We lead by example.

. And so I am proud to represent this county. I am

proud to be part of a government that takes these things seriously.

. And I will continue to do that.

. No, every country has the obligation and the commitment

to enforce its borders. How we treat people, how a country

treats immigrants is a subject that we could have a whole hearing

on. But I have no doubt that there is an obligation of every country

to have border control.

. I understand.

. Thank you. I share Jeff’s assessment. I do—I am

concerned about continued detentions, a number, perhaps several

hundred people are still detained without charge. We continue to

press on that. I am concerned about the dismissals, but as Secretary

Feltman said, they have begun to reintegrate those people

back to their jobs.

I think we are at a critical place right now and again, in contrast

to the countries we have been talking about, there is a strong relationship

with Bahrain. We do have a very open dialogue, and I

think it is important for us both to keep re-emphasizing the

strength of the partnership and at the same time have an honest

discussion about the need for general reconciliation and for moving

forward in a way that does really allow all segments of that society

to participate in the political life of that country.

So this is a critical moment and I am glad that you are paying

attention to it.