Mr. Speaker, the abuse of Iraqi prisoners by American

soldiers and personnel constitute deplorable, despicable acts. We are

all sickened by the pictures of our troops laughing and pointing at

Iraqi prisoners who had been stripped naked, possibly beaten, and

forced to pose in sexually explicit positions. These actions have

compromised not only our mission in Iraq, but also the reputation of

the American governments and its agents. Let me be clear: All but a few

of our

soldiers and military personnel perform their jobs honorably on behalf

of the American people, and our military is playing an important role

in keeping the peace and promoting democracy around the world.

Our next step is clear: Congress must hold an open, complete and

bipartisan investigation into these terrible allegations. We have a

responsibility to oversee our military and intelligence services, and

only through an independent investigation by Congress will we be able

to regain our Nation's credibility as a champion for human rights. I am

disappointed that the pending resolution does not reference an

independent inquiry by Congress. The Pentagon must also take quick

action to punish those involved, including holding those superiors who

knew, encouraged, condoned, or should have known about those abuses.

The resolution rightly points out the military must undertake

corrective action to address chain of command deficiencies and systemic

deficiencies in the military. We must also examine the role played by

American civilian contractors in performing governmental functions such

as interrogation of enemy prisoners.

Mr. Speaker, I serve as the Ranking Member of the Commission on

Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), commonly known as the

Helsinki Commission. The United States is one of the fifty-five nations

that serve as members of the Organization for Security and Cooperation

in Europe (OSCE), the largest regional security organization in the

world.

The United States has agreed to a number of Helsinki commitments

beginning in 1989 in Vienna regarding democracy, rule of law, and human

rights. We regularly criticize other governments in Europe and Central

Asia when they use, condone, or fail to stop acts of torture in their

prisons. Part of our commitments include: The education and training of

all personnel--whether civil, medical, or military--that handle

prisoners; systematic review of interrogation rules, methods, and

practices; and a systematic review of arrangements for custody and

treatment of detained persons, with a view to preventing any cases of

torture. The OSCE publishes a ``preventing torture'' handbook to help

Participating States eradicate torture.

As the United States seeks to wage a global war on terrorism, many

questions have been raised regarding U.S. efforts to combat terrorism

and whether related actions are consistent with our international

obligations and commitments. Last year on June 26, on the International

Day in Support of the Victims of Torture, President Bush declared that

``Torture anywhere is an affront to human dignity everywhere.'' He

observed that ``Freedom from torture is an inalienable human right.''

The State Department has also noted that ``Freedom from torture is an

inalienable human right, and the prohibition of torture is a basic

principle of international human rights law. This prohibition is

absolute and allows no exception.'' Finally, as the General Counsel to

the Defense Department, William Haynes wrote to Senator Leahy that,

``the United States does not permit, tolerate, or condone any such

torture by its employees under any circumstances.''

Mr. Speaker, last year I offered, and then withdrew, an amendment to

the Department of Defense Appropriations bill for FY 04 that would

prohibit the use of any funds in the bill from being used to carry out

torture. I was disturbed by a December 2002 article in the Washington

Post. The article cited a number of defense and intelligence sources

which allege that some detainees in Afghanistan and elsewhere may have

been tortured.

The abuse of Iraqi prisoners by American soldiers not only harmed the

victims, but also harmed our country. It has damaged our mission in

Iraq. It has soiled our reputation in pursuit of humanitarian issues.

What happened in Baghdad's Abu Ghraib prison does not reflect U.S.

values. We must speak out and take action against torture anywhere in

the world, even if it occurs under our watch. We must act decisively.