Mr. Speaker, I rise to strongly condemn the mistreatment of

prisoners and detainees in Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. These abuses are

outrageous, deplorable, un-American, and contrary to the values and

ethics that our country espouses. The atmosphere that allowed this to

happen shows a level of tolerance for abuse that is intolerable.

The United States has suffered a blow to its credibility and effort

to bring democracy to the Iraqi people. Photographs showing the abuse

that Iraqi prisoners and detainees have suffered at the hands of

American personnel damage the standing of the vast majority of U.S.

troops in Iraq, who are performing with honor, bravery, and

professionalism.

The response of the Bush administration to reports of systemic abuse

has been both problematic and disquieting. Major General Antonio M.

Taguba's report detailing these abuses, prepared in late February,

should have been recognized as a serious matter. Instead, it was

largely ignored. I am also disappointed that the administration chose

to keep Congress and the public in the dark about this situation until

the national news media decided to run the story last week. The

administration has a responsibility to inform Congress and act

decisively when volatile situations arise.

The U.S. Congress has a critical responsibility to conduct thorough

and bipartisan oversight investigations to ensure that those involved

are held accountable for their actions. These investigations must

address possible abuse by U.S. civilian contractor personnel or other

U.S. civilians, as well as the command structure and systemic

deficiencies that contributed to such abuse.

The abuse that has occurred at Abu Ghraib is the latest in a series

of very serious failures of leadership from military and civilian

leaders. The President and his team were wrong about weapons of mass

destruction in Iraq. They were wrong about the way American soldiers

would be greeted by the Iraqi people. They were wrong about how much

the war would cost and how long it would last. And they were wrong

about the number of soldiers necessary to win the war and secure the

peace. Now, in light of serious human rights violations, they did

nothing to get to the bottom of it. This mishandling has created an

international crisis that could set the Iraqi people against American

efforts in the Middle East for generations. The President must

recognize these consistent failures and take decisive action.

I ask unanimous consent to include in today's Congressional Record a

letter that I sent to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld of February

5, along with six of my House colleagues. This letter inquires about

the policy of CPA forces detaining Iraqis without due process and

notification to their families. I also ask unanimous consent to include

the response that we received from Thomas L. Carter, Senior Counselor

to Ambassador L. Paul Bremer, III. Though the response is dated March

22, it was not received until May 3, three months after my initial

inquiry. This response testifies that the processes established

``afford all persons in Coalition custody all the rights and safeguards

set out in applicable International Humanitarian Law.''