Mr. President, Iraq is a dangerous and chaotic place for

our brave American soldiers there, for our coalition partners, and for

Iraqi families who must struggle just to make it safely through each

day. It is also a perilous place for the journalists who attempt to

cover the situation on the ground. They are at the front of the front

lines of this conflict, and the dispatches from Iraq produced by

representatives of a free and independent press are a vital conduit of

information that helps the American people--and their representatives

in government--to make more informed decisions. These are print

reporters, television correspondents, photo journalists and the other

professionals who help journalists in gathering and transmitting the

news.

We learned in recent days of the deaths of two more news

professionals. Raad Jaafar Hamadi, a journalist with the daily Al

Sabah, was shot dead in his car in the east of Baghdad on November 22.

Fadhila Abdelkarim, an administrative staff worker of TV station

Nainawa, was shot outside her home in Mosul on November 26.

American media professionals have been among the casualties. They are

as well known to us as NBC correspondent David Bloom, and those who we

will never know by their bylines or on our TV screens. Director General

Koichiro Matsuura of the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural

Organization--UNESCO--this week noted that the number of media

professionals killed in Iraq continues to grow unabated, and that

According to Reporters without Borders--RSF--137 journalists and

media assistants have been killed in Iraq since the start of the war in

2003, while 51 have been kidnapped. According to RSF, four of the

kidnap victims are still being held hostage.

Some in the administration have chosen over the years to disparage

the journalists serving in Iraq--for instance, labeling them ``lazy''

or unwilling to leave their bureaus or hotels.

The reality is far different. Day after day, journalists in Iraq

face, and accept, incredible dangers just to do their jobs. As news

professionals on one of the most challenging and important news beats

on the planet, they deserve great credit for their courage and their

commitment, and they deserve our appreciation.