Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may

consume.

I also rise in support of House Resolution 944, and I want to thank

the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. Peters) and the gentleman from

Virginia (Mr. Wolf) for bringing this important human rights issue

before us today.

The protection of members of vulnerable religious and ethnic

minorities, including the smallest minority groups, is integral to the

future of Iraq as a free and stable country. Iraq is home to ancient

and diverse Catholic, Orthodox, and other Christian groups, including

Chaldean, Assyrian, Syriac, and Armenian Christians, among many others.

They have been targeted for kidnapping and murder by radical Islamic

extremists. Various credible sources estimate that more than half of

Iraq's Christians have already fled the country during the last several

years.

However, these dangers are certainly not confined to Christians. The

Baha'i faith remains prohibited in Iraq, and Iraq's ancient and once-

flourishing Jewish community has reportedly dwindled to fewer than a

dozen people.

All of us understand that Iraq's young democracy faces many

challenges, including its own threats from insurgents and other

extremists. But the marginalization, the displacement, the violence

that threatens Iraq's minority communities also endanger the vitality

and the inclusiveness of Iraqi society as a whole.

We must strive to ensure that the work that we and our allies do

helps to build Iraq's capacity and commitment to protect its minority

citizens, and we must encourage the Government of Iraq to ensure that

its forthcoming elections are an opportunity to reinforce the growth of

democracy and freedom in that country. Those elections should be safe,

should be fair, should be transparent so that all Iraqis, including

members of these vulnerable religious and ethnic minority communities,

can participate. And we must not let members of those minorities under

siege think that they are alone or that they are forgotten.

For these reasons, Madam Speaker, I am grateful for this resolution,

which deserves our unanimous support.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.