Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of

H. Res. 944--``Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives on

religious minorities in Iraq.'' As a cosponsor of this resolution, I

join my colleagues in expressing my concern about the plight of

vulnerable religious and ethnic minorities of Iraq, and we are

particularly concerned for the Chaldeans, Syriacs, Assyrians, and other

Christians, Sabean Mandeans, Yazidis, Baha'is, Jews, and Muslim ethnic

minorities, the Shabak and Turkomen, and other religious and ethnic

minorities of Iraq.

Political and religious freedom in Iraq is a vital concern with

regards to the nation and region. When we envision the long-term peace

and security of Iraq, we envision a country with a strong, functioning

democracy that respects the rights of all citizens. That vision is not

a product of the imperialism of Western ideas; the tradition of

religious plurality has roots in the history and religious beliefs of

the Iraqi people. But, although Iraq has a strong history of

multiculturalism, it must not rest on this reputation. The rights of

minorities in Iraq are not fully protected, and the Iraqi government

can and must do more to protect the rights of its minorities.

The degree to which Iraq protects those rights is a reflection on our

country. Because of the United States' unfortunate detour from our

struggle against terrorism into Iraq, the actions of the new government

of Iraq directly reflect upon us. So far, I believe that the actions of

the government of Iraq with respect to political and religious freedoms

are problematic.

In no case is the Iraqi government's treatment of minorities more

troubling than their treatment of the residents of Camp Ashraf.

Although Camp Ashraf is halfway around the world, the conditions there

affect Americans, including in my own district and throughout the state

of Texas where some of my constituents have family members in Camp

Ashraf. For example, my constituent, Mitra Sohrabi, has a brother who

is currently detained in Camp Ashraf, and worries about his health on a

daily

basis. I also know many people in Houston and throughout the state of

Texas who were affected directly by the July 2009 raid on Camp Ashraf.

Late last year, three months after U.S. forces turned over control of

Camp Ashraf, Iraqi Security Forces violated the human rights of the

People's Mujahideen of Iran (PMOI). Camp Ashraf detains over 3,400

exiled Iranian political dissidents, who are members of the PMOI,

including over 1,000 women. The PMOI opposes the current Iranian

regime, and for their political beliefs they have been exiled from Iran

and sequestered in Camp Ashraf. Several women detained at Camp Ashraf

have reported acts of intimidation and threats of physical and sexual

violence by members of the Iraqi security forces.

On July 28, 2009, Iraqi Security Forces conducted a raid on the

detainees at Camp Ashraf. The raid occurred fewer than three months

after the U.S. passed control of Camp Ashraf to the government of Iraq.

The raid began on Tuesday, July 28th when Iraqi armored vehicles began

attacks against the Iranian prisoners. The attacks continued for two

full days and resulted in the death of 11 exiles and the injury of over

400 more. As a result of the raid on Camp Ashraf, 36 men were arrested

under allegations of violent behavior. The 36 arrested Camp Ashraf

residents have since been freed, but the United States has a continuing

interest in ensuring that the events of July 28th never occur again.

Although most of the residents of Camp Ashraf were not religious

minorities, the Iraqi government's treatment of the camp's residents

sets a dangerous example. In recent years, there have been alarming

numbers of religiously motivated killings, abductions, beatings, rapes,

threats, intimidation, forced conversions, marriages, and displacement

from homes and businesses, and attacks on religious leaders, pilgrims,

and holy sites, in Iraq, with the smallest religious minorities in Iraq

having been among the most vulnerable, although Iraqis from many

religious communities, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, have suffered in

this violence. In summary, members of small religious minority

communities in Iraq do not have militia or tribal structures to defend

them, do not receive adequate official protection, and are legally,

politically, and economically marginalized.

This resolution will remind the Iraqi government that minorities of

any type--be it race, religion, political affiliation, or difference of

thought--are integral components of a robust civil society and a true

democracy. I have faith that Iraq can and will achieve such a

democracy, but we must remember that building democracy requires more

than a constitution--it requires a commitment to democratic principles.