Madam Speaker. I rise tonight in support of H. Res.

44, a resolution expressing concern about the situation facing

religious minorities in Iraq. I'd like to thank my colleague,

Congressman Peters, for introducing this resolution, and for being a

persistent champion on this important issue.

I am proud to cosponsor this resolution, which encourages the United

States government, the Iraqi government, and the international

community to take positive steps to protect Iraqi religious minorities.

Nearly seven years after the U.S.-led invasion, Iraq faces one of the

largest displacement crises in the world. The country's religious

minorities face a particularly desperate situation. Iraqi ethno-

religious minorities, including Iraqi Jews as well as Assyrians,

Chaldeans, and Syriac Christians, continue to face targeted killings,

sexual assaults, abductions, and other forms of threats and violence.

They comprise a disproportionately large percentage of the over 4

million Iraqis who have been displaced by the ongoing violence and

instability.

Those who flee Iraq often encounter a life of crippling poverty. Many

have great difficulty finding work in their new countries and often

cannot support their families. They may bear physical and emotional

scars as a result of years of trauma, tragedy, and abuse. Those who

stay in Iraq, on the other hand, face a life of constant fear,

intimidation, and outright violence.

I have a longstanding concern for Iraq's ethno-religious minorities.

In particular, I have worked closely with Chicago's vibrant Assyrian

community on efforts to protect Iraqi religious minorities and provide

opportunities for refugees. In August of last year I wrote to Secretary

Clinton, urging her to develop a comprehensive plan for protecting

these groups. This critical issue is crying out for the attention it

deserves.

That's why this resolution is so important. The protection of ethno-

religious minorities must be a component of our overall strategy in

Iraq, and the United States government must do more in partnership with

the Iraqi government and the rest of the international community to

ensure that all Iraqis, regardless of religious affiliation, can live

free of fear and intimidation.