Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me the

time and for his extraordinary leadership on human rights for people

around the world.

And I know that he joins his voice, his strength, his wisdom in

working with the Iraqi Women's Caucus to do absolutely everything to

protect the women in Iraq.

Today's USA news report has an article that states that the

government may designate Islam Sharia as a main source of legislation

in the country according to a draft. This is incredibly troubling that

the rights of women may be turned back. It would be a terrible step for

the women if their rights are actually restricted under this new

constitution.

This resolution which we are sending to the government is

tremendously important, and I would like to be associated with the

comments on both sides of the aisle.

Just last week, we met with women leaders from Iraq. Two of them were

official members of the government, and they were major leaders in

their communities. They expressed their tremendous concern, and they

appealed to us to keep their names confidential, showing the fear that

they feel for retaliation.

I have corresponded with several Iraqi women. One was murdered,

another one had a tremendous threat on her life, and they are working

with incredible strength for their country and for the rights of their

families.

I would say that any country that protects their women is a stronger

country, and Iraq will be a stronger country if women are able to

preserve their position. One of the women we met with was a

professional, and she had been denied her job.

Under Sharia, women will lose many of the rights that they already

have. As one of them said to me, and I quote: ``It is horrible. We are

concerned. You must do something. The time is now.''

August 15 they will be coming forward with the final draft. They will

be voting in October, and we must move forward. Just yesterday, along

with 40 of my colleagues, I sent a letter to President Bush urging him

and the State Department to do everything they possibly can to

encourage the drafters of the constitution to include specific rights

for women, thereby ensuring their equality and their full participation

in the new Iraq country.

Under the former regime, they were educated, participated in the

workforce, and played a role in the government. And since the end of

the Saddam Hussein dictatorship, women have served and are serving in

the national assembly as cabinet members and in local governments

across their country.

I have had the opportunity twice to visit Iraq, to visit our

soldiers, to meet with officials, and always to meet with women

leaders. They are concerned. They are working hard, and with like-

minded men are trying to preserve their role.

If they lose their position in the constitution, it will be

incredibly difficult to reverse that. So it is critically important,

and it would be a tragic irony

if women now began to lose ground. There might be full participation

and equal treatment under the law for women in Iraq, and I know that my

colleagues on both sides of the aisle, I hope they will join the

Women's Iraqi Caucus in expressing our strong support and solidarity

with the women of Iraq as they fight for the rights to which they are

entitled.

I would just like to close that it would be really a tragedy beyond

words if women lose their standing in the constitution and lose the

firm grounded protection of a constitution. This is critically

important. I urge all of my colleagues to join us in supporting this

important resolution.

Mr. Speaker, I include the following for the Record: