Mr. Speaker, H. Res. 383 encourages the transitional

assembly of Iraq to adopt a constitution that grants women equal

rights. It was authored by the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. Granger) and

also the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. Tauscher) and myself, who

are cochairs of the Iraqi Women's Caucus.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say just a word about the Iraqi Women's

Caucus. This was formed a couple of years ago by former Representative

Jennifer Dunn and myself, with the belief that Iraqi women are critical

to holding the social fabric of Iraq together and bringing Sunnis and

Kurds and Shias together.

And as we have talked to them, we found that this is the case, that

this is true. Because many of them are married. Sunnis are married to

Shias and they have other sects within their families. And they

consistently tell us that the divisions are not what people think in

the United States.

But we think that women are the key and probably as important as guns

and bullets and tanks and helicopters to achieving a peaceful

resolution in Iraq. Some of us visited Jordan in March. And we met with

150 Iraqi women near the Dead Sea. These women drove from many points

within Iraq. Two groups were shot at on the way, which shows you the

resolution that they had, because they continued on their journey.

We visited with many women's groups from Iraq, in the United States

and Iraq, as we have traveled. I visited with prime minister al-Jaafari

in Iraq in March. And I asked him this question: I said, will you give

Iraqi women a prominent role in the government? And the answer that he

gave me was, yes, that he would do that, that he would ensure that.

So as many people are aware, one-third of the 275 seats in the

transitional national assembly have been given to women, which is a

very good thing. But on May 10 of this year, 55 members of the national

assembly were chosen to draft a permanent constitution for Iraq by

August 15.

Of that 55, approximately 10 or 11 were women, which again does not

sound too bad. But as we met with Iraqi women last week, they said the

women that were chosen were among the most conservative, among the most

fundamentalist group within the national assembly, and therefore they

were really concerned about what was happening in regard to Sharia.

And so as everyone knows, Sharia is Islamic law, and this was what

was written in a draft of the constitution

that was given to us by these women. And in the eighth article this is

what it says: ``The government vouches for women's duties toward family

and their work in the society, equalizing her to men in all political,

educational, social and economic fields.'' So far so good.

All sounds good. But then there is this last phrase, without

infracting Islam, which means that whatever rights a women has cannot

be in contradiction to Islamic law. This was the thing that concerned

these women so much.

As was mentioned earlier, one of those women who came here was a

judge, who had been installed on the court, but was removed from her

judgeship because of Sharia.

There is great concern at this point. So this resolution urges Iraqi

leaders to accord Iraqi women equal rights under the Constitution.

Let me just close, Mr. Speaker, by saying this: Iraqi women as we

meet with them are really concerned about security. We do not want to

minimize that. We do not want to pretend that Iraq is a real safe

place. They are really concerned about the infrastructure, and there

are some problems in the infrastructure. But when asked if they would

prefer life under Saddam or if they would prefer that the United States

pull out, they will almost unanimously say things like this: Things are

better now. We see help for the future. We have a hope. We see a

brighter future. Please do not leave now. Thank you for removing

Saddam.

So even though things are difficult, there is hope. And as long as

you have hope, we think that there is a brighter future. And I think

that women are truly a major part of whatever resolution we may receive

in Iraq that would be of an optimistic nature.