Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of House

Resolution 383, to encourage the Transnational Assembly of Iraq to

adopt a constitution that grants women equal rights under the law and

works to protect such rights.

Frankly, it's no secret that the women of Iraq faced horrific times

under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. Women confronted terror on a

daily basis and far too often lost their loved ones to the brutality of

the regime.

Since the fall of Saddam's regime and the emergence of a new

democratic government, the women of Iraq have made tremendous progress

in reclaiming their rightful place in society. These women have

overcome unimaginable obstacles and deserve our ongoing support as they

work to build a new democracy.

I have been fortunate enough to have met with many Iraqi women during

two visits to Jordan and Iraq this year. Despite finding themselves in

a dangerous environment, their dedication to achieving a democracy is

inspirational.

The elections that were held in Iraq were only the first step towards

democracy and equality. Thankfully, the transitional government was

committed to including women in the election process and ultimately

decided that every third name on each list would be a woman's name. As

a result, 31 percent of those elected to the Transnational Assembly of

Iraq are women. These elected women are participating in the writing of

the constitution which has a deadline of completion of August 15th.

But the women of Iraq continue to face obstacles. A current hurtle is

whether or not equal rights for women are included in the Iraqi

Constitution. Their inclusion or omission will determine the future of

Iraqi women's rights under the law, status in society, and role in the

government. Iraqi women understand this and want their rights clearly

defined in the constitution. They realize that unless their rights are

firmly established, their future is not ensured and it will be far too

easy to strip away these rights. Women constitute 60 percent of the

Iraqi population. Leaving the majority of Iraqis out of the

Constitution will not only prove detrimental to Iraqi women, but to the

future health and prosperity of Iraqi society.

I urge my colleagues to support this resolution, and I strongly

encourage the Transnational Assembly of Iraq to grant women equal

rights under the law.