Madam President, I

have the honor of being the chair of the

U.S. Helsinki Commission representing

this body. This is a commission which

was established in 1975 in order to implement

the U.S. responsibilities in the

Organization for Security and Cooperation

in Europe. Its membership includes

all the countries of Europe, as

well as the former Republics of the Soviet

Union, Canada, and the United

States.

The main principles of Helsinki are

we are interested in each other’s security.

In order to have a secure nation,

you need to have a nation that respects

the human rights of its citizens, which

provides economic opportunity for its

citizens, as well as the defense of their

borders. We also have partners for cooperation,

particularly in the Mediterranean

area, that used the Helsinki

principles in order to try to advance security

in their region.

During this past recess, I took the

opportunity to visit that region on behalf

of the U.S. Helsinki Commission. I

was joined by several of our colleagues

looking at the current security issues.

Our first visit was to Israel, and our

main focus, quite frankly, was on

Syria—what is happening today in

Syria.

In Israel, we had a chance to meet

with the Israeli officials, and it was interesting

as to how many brought up

the concerns about Syria. They were

concerned about Syria’s impact on

Israel’s neighbors and what was going

to happen as far as security in that region.

While we were there, there was an

episode on the Syrian-Israeli border,

and the Israelis provided health care to

those who were injured, providing humanitarian

assistance. We thank the

Israelis for providing that humanitarian

assistance.

It was interesting that the Israeli officials

pointed out the concern about

the refugees who are leaving Syria

going into neighboring countries. We

know the vast numbers. There are almost

1 million Syrians who have left

Syria for other countries because of

the humanitarian concerns. About onequarter

of a million have gone to Jordan,

about 280,000 are in Lebanon,

about 281,000 in Turkey, another 90,000

in Iraq, and 16,000 in Egypt.

Israel is concerned about the security

of its neighbors and concerned about

how Jordan is dealing with the problems

of the Syrian refugees, how Lebanon

is handling them. We note the

concerns about Hezbollah operations in

Lebanon and how that is being handled

with the Syrian refugee issue.

We had a chance to travel to Turkey

when we left Israel. We met first with

the Turkish officials in Ankara, and we

received their account as to what was

happening in Syria and what Turkey

was doing about it. We then had a

chance to visit the border area between

Turkey and Syria.

We visited a refugee camp named

Kilis, where there has been about 18,000

Syrian refugees. We also had a chance

to meet with the opposition leaders

who were in that camp, as well as later

when we were in Istanbul meeting with

the opposition leaders from Syria.

I mention that all because the humanitarian

crisis is continuing in the

country of Syria. The Assad regime is

turning on its own people. Over 70,000

have been killed since the Arab Spring

started in Syria. While we were there,

the Assad regime used scud missiles

against its own people, again killing

Syrians and killing a lot of innocent

people in the process. This is a humanitarian

disaster.

I wish to mention one bright spot, if

I might. We had a chance to visit the

camps, I said, in Kilis, on the border of

Syria and Turkey, in Turkey. We had a

chance to see firsthand how the Syrian

refugees are being handled by the

Turkish Government. I want to tell

you, they are doing a superb job. I

think it is a model way to handle a situation

such as this. They have an open

border.

The border area at that point is controlled

by the Syrian freedom fighters.

They control that area. The Turks allowed

the Syrians to come in and find

a safe haven. The Turkish Government

has built housing for the refugees in

the camp. We had a chance to see their

children in schools. They are attending

schools. They are getting proper food

and proper medical attention. They

have the opportunity to travel where

they want in Turkey, freedom of movement.

They have the opportunity to go

back to Syria if they want to go back

to Syria. The Turkish authorities are

providing them with a safe haven and

adequate help. They are doing this primarily

with their own resources.

There is one other thing we observed

when we were in this camp on the border.

We had a chance to meet with the

elected representatives of the refugees

in Kilis. They actually had an election.

They don’t have that opportunity in

Syria. They are learning how to cast

their votes. They are learning what democracy

is about. They are learning

what representation is about. We had a

chance to talk to these representatives

about the circumstances in Syria and

what we could do to help.

First, I want to point out there is

still a tremendous need for the international

community to contribute to

the humanitarian needs of those who

are affected in Syria. There are approximately

4 million Syrians in need

of humanitarian assistance. There are

21⁄2 million internally displaced people

within Syria. The United States has

taken the lead as far as humanitarian

aid, having provided $384 million. Other

countries have stepped up but, quite

frankly, more needs to be done.

In talking with the opposition leaders—

and we had a chance to talk to

them in depth when we were in

Istanbul—they expressed to us a sense

of frustration that there hasn’t been a

better, more unified international response

to the actions of the Assad regime—

to what the Assad regime has

done to its own people—and to get

Assad out of Syria. Quite frankly, they

understand—or, as we explained—some

countries might be willing to provide a

certain type of help; other countries

may not. The United States has provided

nonlethal help, other countries

are providing weapons, still other

countries training. But we need to coordinate

that. The absence of coordination

provides a void in which extreme

elements are more likely to get into

the opposition, and that is something

we all want to make sure doesn’t happen.

The message I took back from those

meetings is that the United States

needs to be in the lead in coordinating

the efforts of the opposition. We made

it clear, and I think the international

community has made it clear, that

Assad must go, and he should go to The

Hague and be held accountable for his

war crimes. He has no legitimacy to remain

in power in Syria. That has been

made clear and we underscored that

point again. We also underscored the

point there is no justification for any

country—any country—providing assistance

to the Assad regime on the

military side. As we know, Russia and

Iran have provided help. That is wrong.

That is only adding to the problems

and giving strength to a person who

has turned on his own people. But then

we also need to coordinate our attentions

so we can provide the help they

need and the confidence they are looking

for so they will have the necessary

training not only to reclaim their

country but then to rule their country

in a democratic way that respects the

rights of all of its citizens.

As the Chair of the Helsinki Commission,

I pointed that out to the Syrian

opposition, that we want to provide the

help so they can rule their country one

day—we hope sooner rather than

later—in a way that respects the rights

of all of its citizens and provides economic

opportunity for its citizens, for

that is the only way they will have a

nation that respects the security of its

country.

That was the message we delivered,

and I hope the United States will join

other countries in a more concerted effort

to get Assad out of Syria. As I

said, I think he should be at The Hague

and held accountable for his war

crimes and held accountable for not allowing

the people of Syria to have a

democratic regime.

With that, Madam President, I yield

the floor.