Mr. President, I want to

take a few moments today to comment

on recent events in Iran, the continuing

protests against that nation’s

ruling regime, the brutal response of

that regime to the legitimate protests

of Iran’s people, and one small step the

United States can and should take to

aid the people of Iran in exercising the

basic human right to protest and hold

their own government accountable.

As my colleagues know well, student

protests in Tehran and other cities

took place on Dec. 7, Student Day, the

anniversary of the 1953 attacks by the

shah’s security services that left three

student protesters dead. Just as those

students sought to protest against an

unjust and repressive government, so

did today’s students. And again, Iran’s

government responded with intimidation,

violence and repression.

Iranian security forces, and paramilitary

militias allied with government

hard-liners, used teargas, batons

and beatings to attack nonviolent protesters

on the campus of Tehran University

and at other universities. The

government’s chief prosecutor told the

state-controlled news agency—apparently

without irony—‘‘So far we have

shown restraint,’’ and threatened even

harsher methods to end the protests.

Sadly, this is a recurring theme in

Iran. Outraged by overwhelming evidence

of fraud designed to keep President

Ahmadinejad in power last June,

students and other Iranians took to the

streets. These nonviolent protests were

met by the regime with escalating levels

of brutality. According to a recent

report from the human rights group

Amnesty International, governmentsponsored

violence and repression in

Iran since the election has reached the

highest level in 20 years. Hundreds of

people have been rounded up and imprisoned,

often under appalling conditions,

without access to legal representation

or indeed any contact with the

outside world. Iranian citizens, according

to the report, were charged with

vague offenses unconnected to any recognizable

criminal charge under Iranian

law.

More than 100 were paraded before

cameras in show trials, with visible

signs of abuse. The Amnesty International

report includes evidence that

the pace of executions by the Iranian

government has increased, a clear and

chilling message to the regime’s critics.

And citizens released from detention

made credible and horrific charges

of abuse while in custody, including allegations

of the widespread use of rape.

This deplorable record is why I and

six colleagues introduced a resolution

last month, approved by this body, expressing

the sense of the Senate that

the government of Iran has routinely

violated the human rights of its citizens,

and calling on the Iranian government

to fulfill its obligations under

international law and its own constitution

to honor and protect the fundamental

rights to which its citizens, and

all human beings, are entitled. We recognized

the need for a strong statement

of condemnation of the regime’s

behavior, and of solidarity with those

Iranians seeking to exercise their right

to protest. The Iranian government

must know that the world is watching.

Mr. President, there is more the

United States can do. I draw my colleagues’

attention to a notice from the

State Department that the administration

will waive certain provisions of

the Iran-Iraq Arms Nonproliferation

Act of 1992 with respect to the export

of personal, Internet-based communications

tools to Iran. This is an important

response to the Iranian government’s

crackdown on its people. The

regime has sharply curtailed the actions

of foreign media representatives

in Iran, making independent observations

of the situation there difficult or

impossible to report. Much of what we

know about the regime’s repression has

come from first-hand accounts by Iranian

citizens, distributed via Internet

tools such as YouTube and Twitter.

These media outlets have become vital,

not only to those of us outside Iran

seeking information about events within

the country, but to Iranian citizens

seeking to communicate with one another.

And they are especially important

given the near total absence of

independent news media in Iran. The

regime has undertaken, even before the

June election, a systematic effort to

eliminate newspapers or broadcasters

that report critically on the government’s

activities. And Iran’s Revolutionary

Guards, closely connected to

government hardliners, have sought to

add media and communication companies

to its growing commercial empire,

tightening the regime’s grip on communications

within Iran.

The State Department recently notified

Congress that it intends to waive

provisions of our sanctions against

Iran to allow Iranians to download

free, mass-market software used in activities

such as e-mail, instant messaging

and social networking. According

to the State Department,

Granting of this waiver is an important

step in ensuring that our actions

here do not impede the attempts by

Iranians to exercise their human

rights. I applaud the administration for

its decision, and hope the people of

Iran will view this as one more sign of

the solidarity between them and the

people of the United States. I ask that

a letter to me from Richard R. Verma,

assistant secretary of state for legislative

affairs, informing the Senate

Armed Services Committee of this

waiver decision, be printed in the

RECORD.

There being no objection, the material

was ordered to be printed in the

RECORD, as follows: