Madam President,

I rise to speak specifically about the

alarming situation in Syria, where the

regime of Bashar al Asad is pursuing a

barbaric campaign of indiscriminate

repression against the Syrian people.

Over the past 2 weeks, the crackdown

pursued by Asad has markedly escalated.

There can no longer be any

doubt about his intentions. As a report

by a respected nongovernmental organization,

the International Crisis

Group, warned this week:

Madam President, in the city of

Deraa, the Asad regime has deployed

tanks against the civilian population.

It has cut off phone lines, water, food,

and electricity, and deployed snipers—

according to human rights groups—

who have been firing at anyone who

ventures outdoors. That includes

young people who are sent outdoors by

their families to try to buy food.

In short, what we see in Deraa is a

broad-based, indiscriminate assault by

Asad’s military forces against the people

of his own country. The evidence is

growing that international crimes are

being perpetrated by Bashar Asad himself

in the city of Deraa in Syria.

The attack on Deraa is just one part

of a course of a broader crackdown by

Syrian security forces across the country—

a crackdown that has left several

hundred people dead. Tanks and military

forces have been reported being

deployed in other cities in Syria. According

to Human Rights Watch, the

number of arbitrary detentions of civilians

and enforced disappearances

around the country has skyrocketed in

recent days as the Asad regime has

swept up not only demonstrators but

women, minors, and family members of

activists. Another Syrian human rights

group has documented more than 500

arrests in Deraa alone since last week,

and thousands more nationwide have

also been detained or disappeared arbitrarily.

As the report by the International

Crisis Group argued—the report I referenced

before that came out earlier

this week:

What is most remarkable of all is

that in the face of and despite these

outrageous inhumane actions by the

Asad regime, the people of Syria refuse

to be silenced. They refuse to be intimidated.

In the face of tanks and

snipers, the people of Syria have continued

to cry out and demonstrate for

their fundamental human rights, and

they have continued to do so peacefully.

Moreover, despite the sectarian

provocations by President Asad, the

message of the protesters has remained

steadfastly one of Syrian national

unity.

Tomorrow, Friday, it is expected

that thousands of brave Syrians will

once again take to the streets of their

cities and towns in protest of the totalitarian

dictatorship that currently

controls their country. As they do so, I

want them to know that the United

States and the rest of the civilized

world stands unequivocally on the side

of the people of Syria in solidarity with

them in their courageous struggle for

their human rights. They should know

also that we are increasingly confident

that the people of Syria can and will

prevail over the Asad regime.

There is much we in the United

States can and must do to help the

Syrian people in their fight for freedom.

Last week, the Obama administration

issued an Executive order authorizing

targeted sanctions against

individuals and organizations responsible

for the human rights abuses in

Syria. The administration used this

newest authority to sanction three

Syrian officials, including Maher al

Asad, the brother of Bashar al Asad.

This was a very important action, and

I thank and commend the Obama administration

for taking it.

There is, however, more that now can

and must be done. To begin with, it is

clear there are many more individuals

in the Syrian Government than the

three named so far who are responsible

for the human rights abuses and worse

that are taking place throughout

Syria. It is urgent and essential that

the Obama administration expand the

sanctions to cover these additional

Syrian officials.

Members of the Syrian security

forces and government must understand

they face a choice in the days

ahead. If they stick with the Asad regime

and participate in the barbaric

crackdown against their fellow Syrians,

their names are going to be made

famous around the world, and they will

be held accountable.

It is also critical that the United

States impose sanctions on Bashar al

Asad himself, for he is the head of the

regime that is systematically carrying

out large-scale human rights abuses. It

is he who is directing his military

forces to fire on his own people. Surely,

it requires a willing suspension of disbelief

to think the order to use military

force against the Syrian people

did not originate with the President of

Syria himself—Bashar al Asad. He

must be held accountable.

I respectfully urge President Obama

to speak out as soon as possible, directly

and personally, about what is

happening in Syria. The moral authority

of the President of the United

States matters enormously at historic

moments such as the one in Syria now.

Unfortunately, there are still many in

Syria and throughout the Middle East

who believe the United States is hedging

its bets in Syria. It is time to put

those doubts to rest.

I have met over the last few weeks,

as recently as yesterday, with Syrian

dissidents, and I have heard the same

question from them again and again:

Why has President Obama not spoken

out personally about what is happening

in Syria?

I say: The administration has made

statements.

They say: We need to hear and see

the President and hear his voice—

President Obama—making clear his

disdain and refusal to accept what is

happening in Syria today.

So I respectfully urge the President

to answer these appeals by Syrian freedom

fighters for support of their cause.

I hope the President can make clear

once again, as he did so effectively in

the cases of Egypt and Libya, that

Bashar al Asad has lost the legitimacy

to lead Syria, and it is time for Bashar

to go.

The United States can also work

with our allies and partners to increase

international pressure on the Asad regime.

Press reports indicate, I am

pleased to note, that the European

Union is preparing to put in place an

arms embargo against Syria, and it is

also considering targeted human rights

sanctions against top Syrian officials. I

fervently hope our European friends

and allies take these and further steps

to increase the pressure on the Asad regime.

I am especially encouraged that the

French Foreign Minister this week correctly

called for Bashar al-Asad to be

sanctioned directly himself, to tie up

his economic assets, to limit his mobility.

In addition to our EU partners, I

wish to say I believe Turkey can also

play a unique leadership role in the

days and weeks ahead to support a successful

democratic transition in Syria.

No one has worked harder than

Prime Minister Erdogan to encourage

Bashar al-Asad to reform, to accept the

legitimate demands of the Syrian people,

and embrace democracy. Unfortunately,

despite these efforts, Asad has

ignored the wise counsel of the Turkish

leader and refused to respond with action.

I, therefore, hope President

Obama will find a way to partner directly

with Prime Minister Erdogan on

developing a new strategy toward

Syria, one that recognizes that despite

our hopes and efforts, there will be no

real progress as long as Bashar al-Asad

remains in power in Damascus, a policy

that aligns our two democracies—

America and Turkey—unequivocally

with the democratic aspirations of the

Syrian people.

We should also work with our allies

on the U.N. Human Rights Council to

ensure that the investigative mission

to Syria, which was agreed upon by the

Council last week, is undertaken immediately.

Every day matters. We

should work to refer Asad’s regime to

the International Criminal Court—

again, as we did in the case of Libya.

What the Asad regime is doing to the

people of Syria looks every day more

the mirror image of what the Qadhafi

regime has done to the people of Libya.

For its actions in the city of Deraa and

throughout the country, the Asad regime

deserves to be investigated by the

International Criminal Court.

I respectfully urge our own administration

to use the diplomatic clout

that we have at the United Nations to

put what is happening in Syria on the

agenda of the U.N. Security Council.

I have no illusions about the challenges

and obstacles that exist at the

Security Council at this time to taking

action with regard to what is happening

in Syria, but we must try. If the

Security Council fails to take up what

is happening in Syria, perhaps because

of the opposition of the Russians and

the Chinese, it does so at the expense

of its own international credibility and

legitimacy.

Finally, I hope President Obama will

work together with our international

allies to provide the Syrian people with

the humanitarian assistance that they

urgently need—food, water, and medical

supplies—and to restore communications

linkages that the Asad regime

has cut among the freedom fighters

in various communities in Syria.

Asad has cut them in an effort to prevent

news and information about what

is happening in Syria also from reaching

the outside world.

The situation in Syria is fast approaching

the point of no return. The

fact is, several hundred Syrians have

been killed by Asad’s security forces.

This is a regime that I conclude is beyond

self-correction. Bashar al-Asad is

not a reformer. He is a corrupt dictator

and an inhumane thug and his regime

has long been one of the worst in the

Middle East. It is time for him to go.

Let me conclude by adding that nearly

a decade after the attacks of September

11, Americans and people

throughout the world awoke Monday

morning to a safer, better world with

Osama bin Laden gone. It is fitting

that Osama bin Laden has been killed

just as Arab democracies across the

Middle East and North Africa are being

born, are coming to life. The peaceful,

youth-driven democratic revolutions

now taking place in Syria, Tunisia,

Egypt, and Libya are the true repudiation

of the extreme ideology that I

will call bin Ladenism. To rid our

world not only of bin Laden but of bin

Ladenism, it is critical that we now do

everything in our power to help the

democratic forces in Syria and across

the Middle East succeed, for it will ultimately

be quite correctly and powerfully

at the hands of his fellow Arabs

and Muslims that the hateful and violent

ideology of bin Laden and its

manifestations of a different sort in

dictatorships across the Middle East

are finally discredited and abandoned

on the ash heap of history where they

belong.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence

of a quorum.