Mr. President, the

Helsinki Commission, which I chair,

held a hearing last week that examined

the close relationship between Russian

Federation and Syria. The Commission

heard testimony detailing their intricate

financial and military dealings

that began in the earliest days of the

Cold War and continue to this day.

This relationship allows Syria to continue

to support numerous terrorist

groups, groups that have terrorized

Lebanon for the past three decades and

fuel the insurgency in Iraq. In addition,

we heard details about Syria’s support

of terrorist organizations who operate

around the world. Finally, we heard

from both Lebanese and Syrians committed

to freedom and democracy who

have become victims of the Assad regime

and are now languishing in the

prison cells of Damascus.

The Commission’s concern regarding

Russia’s involvement with Syria—a

country that has been listed as a state

sponsor of terrorism since 1979 by the

State Department—rises from the Helsinki

commitments that Russia has

freely accepted as a participating State

of the Organization for Cooperation

and Security in Europe OSCE. The

OSCE Charter on Preventing and Combating

Terrorism was agreed to at the

Porto Ministerial in 2002. Russia then

committed to refrain from instigating

or providing active or passive support

or assistance to, or otherwise sponsoring

terrorist acts in another state.

Russia also committed to reducing the

risk of terrorists gaining access to

weapons and materials of mass destruction

and their means of delivery.

Russia’s support for the terrorist regime

in Damascus flies in the face of

these commitments. Russia is an active

enabler of the Assad regime, whose

Ba’ath Party was described by one of

our witnesses as the richest terrorist

organization in the region. The Syrian

regime has received untold amounts of

military hardware, much of which are

currently being used by terrorists in

Iraq against our American troops and

our allies. Additionally, Syrian intelligence

supports terrorist units in Iraq,

composed not only of Syrians, but including

Egyptians, Sudanese, Moroccans,

and other Islamic mujaheddin.

Even more alarming is Russia’s plan

to sell an unknown number of Igla SA–

18 shoulder-held missiles to Syria.

Such a sale to this terrorist state is

more than criminal. This sale will put

in the hands of terrorists some of the

most sophisticated shoulder-held missiles

in the Russian inventory, and increases

the likelihood that they will

get into the arsenals of other terrorist

organizations around the world. Despite

Russia’s denials, indicators are

that this sale will go forward soon, putting

at risk every airline flight, every

military flight, with the potential for

massive loss of life and the shutting

down of modern transportation around

the world.

We must focus on the fact that, while

there is no apparent direct Russian involvement

in Iraq, this direct support

of Syrian military and intelligence operations,

coupled with Syria’s support

for Hezbollah in Lebanon and the long

list of evil deeds coming out of Damascus,

cast Russia as a suspicious party

to these terrorist activities. We should

not sit idly by and allow this to transpire

without comment. We must call

upon President Bush and Secretary

Rice to reiterate U.S. demands that

Russia disengage from its support of

Syria, a state sponsor of terrorism. It

is not enough to stop the sale of the

missiles. Complete cessation of financial

and military support to this rogue

regime is necessary.

On the eve of the Helsinki Commission

hearing, a courageous group of

human rights activists and pro democracy

reformists held a demonstration

in Damascus, a daring display of dissent

quickly broken up by the security

forces. One of the protesters held up at

banner that read: ‘‘Freedom for Prisoners

of Opinion and Conscience.’’ According

to the Syrian Human Rights

Committee, the Assad regime in Damascus

has executed nearly 17,000 Syrian

and Lebanese prisoners. Additionally,

there are over 600 prisoners of

conscience in Syrian jails, champions

of human rights, accountability and

transparency who are still languishing

under horrible conditions.

I would like to highlight a few of

these prisoners of conscience whose

names were submitted to us by one of

the witnesses and call for their immediate

release: Riad Seif, member of parliament;

Aref Dalilah, economist;

Maamun al-Homsi, member of parliament;

Abdul Aziz al-Khayer, physician;

Habib Issa, lawyer; Walid al-

Bounni, physician; Mohammad Bashir

al-Arab, student leader and doctor;

Muhanad al-Debs, student leader;

Mahmoud Ammo, activist; Mahmoud

Abou Sader, activist; Mazid Ali Al-

Terkawi, businessman; and Fawaz

Tello, engineer.

I was pleased to hear of Syria’s promise

to a U.N. envoy to withdraw its

troops and intelligence agents from

Lebanon, but as the counter-demonstrations

yesterday against Syria demanded,

Damascus must follow

through with actions as soon as possible.

I am hoping that details of the

withdrawal plan from U.N. envoy Terje

Roed-Larsen after his talks with Syrian

President Bashar Assad and Lebanese

President Emile Lahoud will

allow the people of Lebanon to hold

their parliamentary elections in May

without any interference from the Syrians

and to do so in a manner that is

free, timely, and transparent.

What would be unacceptable is the

kind of warning issued by Prime Minister-

designate Omar Karami that polls

may have to be postponed if the country’s

political opposition fails to enter

a dialogue with the government. Such

an effort will surely ignite the kind of

violence that the Lebanese people have

been yearning for so many years to

avoid.

It is time for the international community

to lend support for the slogan

that defines the people’s revolution in

Lebanon and in the region: ‘‘Kifaya,’’

which means ‘‘enough.’’ Let’s listen to

what the people in Lebanon are saying

for what they are saying is now being

heard not only in Beirut but in

Damascas, in Cairo, and in Riyahd:

enough of autocrats, enough of the corruption,

and enough of the repression.