Mr. President, I

rise today to once again draw attention

to the continuing war in Chechnya and

to urge the Administration to include

Chechnya high on the agenda at next

months G–7 summit.

Colleagues, last Wednesday I met

with Mr. II-yas AK-ma-dov who was

here to present a peace proposal on behalf

of the Chechen people. This peace

proposal calls for the immediate introduction

of a formal cease-fire, the formation

of an international commission

to investigate allegations of war

crimes on both sides of the conflict,

and the start of political negotiations

through the mediation of the Organization

for Security and Cooperation in

Europe. Mr. Ak-ma-dov relayed to me

his serious concern at the desperation

of the people in Chechnya, and noted

that many of the recent suicide attacks

we have heard about are a direct

result of that desperation.

Mr. President, colleagues, we must

seize every opportunity, including the

upcoming G–7 summit, to continue to

relay our serious concerns with the intransigence

of the Russian Federation

to acknowledge the concerns of the

international community. The G–7

summit, which became the G–8 with

the inclusion of the Russian Federation,

is an association of democratic

societies with advanced economies. Although

Russia is not yet a liberal democracy

or an advanced economy, it

was invited to take part in this summit

in encourage its democratic evolution.

Today as I watch Russia continue to

deny international human rights monitors

access to Chechnya in defiance of

the international community, I must

question that evoluation.

In February this body passed

Rsolution 262 which called on President

Putin to allow international monitors

immediate, full, and unimpeded access

into and around Chechnya to report on

the situation there and to investigate

alleged atrocities and war crimes. In

March, the Council of Europe Parliamentary

Assembly suspended the

voting rights of Russia due to the large

number of reports of human rights violations

in Chechnya. And Mr. President,

at the 56th Session of the U.N.

Commission on Human Rights last

April, the Commission harshly criticized

the Russian military’s behavior

in Chechnya. The Commission approved

a Resolution calling on the Russian

government to establish a commission

of inquiry into human rights

abuses in Chechnya and mandating visits

to Chechnya by U.N. special envoys

on torture, political killings, and violence

against women. Yet, despite all

this condemnation, Russia continues to

ignore our requests.

The war in Chechnya from 1994–1996

left over 80,000 civilians dead. The number

of deaths of innocent civilians rises

daily as the current war continues.

This is due not only to fighting, but to

the inability of international organizations

to easily distribute much needed

humanitarian aid. A recent report from

the U.N. High Commission on Refugees

noted that elderly and sick people in

the capital Grozny have difficulty

reaching soup kitchens which are scattered

throughout the city due to continued

fighting. Russia has closed investigations

into alleged human rights

abuses by Russian soldiers citing a

lack of evidence, and none of the U.N.

mandated special envoys to Chechnya

have been given access to the area.

Just three weeks ago customs officials

in Moscow confiscated an Amnesty

International report on human rights

violations in Chechnya.

Mr. President, this body and the

international community has consistently

spoken out demanding the Russian

government allow into Chechnya

international human rights monitors.

It is important that we not turn silent

now.

In her address to the U.N. Human

Rights Commission in March, Secretary

Albright said that no nation

should feel threatened by the Commission’s

work since its task is to support

the right of people everywhere to control

their own destinies, and that the

Commission asks only that its members

play by global rules. Mr. President,

colleagues, the United States

must seize the opportunity of next

month’s G–7 summit in Japan to once

again demand that Russia play by

these rules. Our leadership within the

G–7 and in the international community

deserves no less. The people of

Chechnya deserve no less.

Mr. President, I had a chance to meet

with the Foreign Minister from

Chechnya last week. I promised him

that, as a Senator, I would speak out

on the floor about what is happening in

Chechnya. Just to summarize, the Foreign

Minister came here with a proposal.

It is a proposal that really calls

for a cease-fire, calls for a political settlement,

calls for international observers

to be there.

What I want to say on the floor of the

Senate is that this is a brutal war.

Many innocent people have been killed.

Certainly, some of the Chechans are responsible

for the murder of Russians;

but, overall, what we have seen is a

tremendous loss of life, the decimation

of a country. I have sent letters to

Putin. I have spoken out about this. I

think it is a human rights question. I

call upon our Government, in particular,

to be much more actively involved

in trying to bring about some

resolution to this conflict.

There are entirely too many innocent

people paying the price. Entirely too

many innocent people are losing their

lives. I think it is a role for our Government

to push for some kind of a

peaceful settlement. I know we need to

negotiate with Putin and be in contact

with the Russian Government and

work with them. I am all for that. I am

not at all interested in rekindling a

cold war. My father is a Jewish immigrant

who fled Russia. But I also believe

we should not turn our gaze away

from what is happening in Chechnya.

We ought to make it crystal clear to

the Russian Government that the

wholesale violation of human rights

and torture and murder of innocent

people is simply not acceptable. The

sooner there is some kind of a political

settlement, the better off the people in

Chechnya and Russia and the world

will be. I don’t believe there is any evidence

at all that this military campaign

is going to work. Violence begets

violence. Violence is met with violence.

I think our Government can play a

more positive role than we have

played. For the Senate today, I call on

the Secretary of State and President

Clinton to be much more actively involved

in trying to bring about a resolution

to this conflict.