obligation under the Geneva Convention which were ratified by the United States in 1955 to protect the victims of war by providing criminal penalties for certain war crimes. Mr. Speaker, this has never been formally enacted by statute, and the bill accomplishes this oversight.

Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting the legislation because it contains a new provision for the death penalty, but I can say that the bill enjoys broad-based support on this side of the aisle.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the gentleman from Virginia, for his comments, and I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from North Carolina, Mr. WALTER JONES, my colleague and friend, and the author of the legislation we are discussing right now.

Mr. JONES. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Texas for yielding time to me.

Before I begin, I want to take a moment to thank Chairman SMITH and his subcommittee counsel, George Fishman, for their hard work and efforts to bring this important legislation to the floor today for consideration.

Mr. Speaker, now more than ever, we are sending our men and women to serve in hostile lands, and the specter of war crimes, looms over almost every U.S. military action abroad. As a member of the House National Security Committee, we have the responsibility of providing these service men and women with the best training and equipment available.

But this Congress should not stop there. We must ensure that we also protect the rights of all Americans who are defending the interests of our country abroad.

While it is difficult to believe, in the absence of a military commission or an international criminal tribunal, the United States currently has no means, by which we can try and prosecute perpetrators of war crimes in our courts. The Geneva Convention of 1949 granted the authority to prosecute individuals for committing ''grave breaches'' of the Geneva Convention, however, the authority was not self-enacting. The Geneva Convention directed each of the participating countries to enact implementing legislation. The United States never did.

Today, it would be possible, to find a known war criminal vacationing in our country, unconcerned with being punished for his crime. A modern-day Adolf Hitler, could move to the United States without worry, as he could not be found guilty in our courts of committing a war crime. We could extradite him or deport him, but we could not try him in America as a war criminal.

It is for these reasons that I have introduced H.R. 3680, the War Crimes Act of 1996. H.R. 3680 will give the United States the legal authority to try and prosecute the perpetrators of war crimes against American citizens. Additionally, those Americans prosecuted will have available all the procedural protections of the American justice system.

I drafted this bill late last year, shortly after I met a gentleman by the name of Capt. Mike Cronin who spent time as an uninvited guest of the ''Hanoi Hilton.'' While serving in Vietnam as an A–6 pilot, Mr. Cronin was shot down and taken prisoner of war. For 6 years he lived in a cage. When he returned, he realized that while he and many others had witnessed war crimes being committed, no justice could be found within the U.S. court system because we had not yet enacted implementing legislation of the Geneva Convention.

It is for Mike Cronin, and the many others like him who were persecuted, that I have fought to bring this legislation to the floor today. While the bill is not retroactive, it can ensure that any future victims of war crimes will be given the protection of the U.S. courts. This is a strong bipartisan bill, which will rectify the existing discrepancy between our Nation's intolerance for war crimes and our inability to prosecute war criminals.

Once again, I would like to thank this body, Chairman SMITH, Chairman HYDE, and Ranking Member CONYERS for their support. Passage of the War Crimes Act of 1996 is a long overdue step in the right direction.

Mr. SCOTT. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CALVERT). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Texas [Mr. SMITH] that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3680.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A message in writing from the President of the United States was communicated to the House by Mr. Edwin Thomas, one of his secretaries.

REGARDING HUMAN RIGHTS IN MAURITANIA

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 142) regarding the human rights situation in Mauritania, including the continued practice of chattel slavery, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 142

Whereas the Government of Mauritania has perpetrated a prolonged campaign of human rights abuses and discrimination against its indigenous black population;

Whereas the Department of State and numerous human rights organizations have documented such abuses;

Whereas chattel slavery, with an estimated tens of thousands of black Mauritanians considered property of their masters and performing unpaid labor, persists despite its legal abolition in 1980;

Whereas individuals attempting to escape from their owners in Mauritania may be subjected to severe punishment and torture;

Whereas the right to a fair trial in Mauritania continues to be restricted due to executive branch pressure on the judiciary;

Whereas policies designed to favor a particular culture and language have marginalized black Mauritanians in the areas of education and employment particularly;

Whereas Mauritanians are deprived of their constitutional right to a democratically elected government;

Whereas Mauritanian authorities have still refused to investigate or punish individuals responsible for the massacre of over 500 military and civilian black Mauritanians in 1990 and 1991; and

Whereas significant numbers of black Mauritanians remain refugees stripped of their citizenship and property, including tens of thousands of black Mauritanians who were expelled or fled Mauritania during 1989 and 1990: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That the Congress—

(1) calls upon the Government of Mauritania to honor its obligations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, to prosecute slave owners to the fullest extent of the country's anti-slavery law, and to educate individuals being held as slaves on their legal rights;

(2) strongly urges the Government of Mauritania to abolish discriminatory practices and foster an environment that will integrate black Mauritanians into the economic and social mainstream;

(3) urges in the strongest terms that the Government of Mauritania fully investigate and prosecute those officials responsible for the extrajudicial killings and mass expulsions of black Mauritanians during the late 1980s and early 1990s;

(4) calls upon the Government of Mauritania to continue to allow all refugees to return to Mauritania and to restore their full rights;

(5) welcomes Mauritania's recent invitation to international human rights organizations to visit Mauritania; and

(6) further welcomes the growth of an independent press in Mauritania.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Nebraska [Mr. BEREUTER] and the gentleman from Guam [Mr. UNDERWOOD] each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Nebraska [Mr. BEREUTER].

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

(Mr. BEREUTER asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Speaker, this legislation was introduced by this Member. It is hard to believe that in 1996, chattel slavery continues to exist in Mauritania. This gross injustice infringes on the most fundamental of human rights of perhaps thousands of that country's underclass. Members of