

to be Laotian security officials abducted the men. After more than 7 months of joint investigation by the U.S. State Department, U.S. Embassies in Laos and Thailand, the Lao and Thai government, not a trace of the men have been found. This is intolerable and unacceptable. It is imperative that all information regarding the disappearance, whereabouts and current circumstances of these two men are expeditiously released and made public to the men's families and to this Congress.

Moreover, with the return of approximately 1200 Hmong to their native Laos from the Ban Napho refugee camp in Thailand, we in Congress need to ensure that these people are not subjected to retribution or oppression by the hands of the Lao government. Passage of this resolution will send such a message.

Mr. Speaker, this resolution is an important first step toward promoting and implementing better human rights standards and, hopefully, democracy in Laos. The Hmong were America's friends during our time of need, we must not forget their sacrifices today.

This body and this Nation has a moral obligation to send a clear message that we are interested in the restoration and the respect of human rights for the people of Laos and we will not tolerate business as usual by the Lao government. I would encourage all my colleagues to support this very important resolution.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. VENTO).

Mr. VENTO. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the ranking member yielding this time to me.

I just wanted to thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN) for his outstanding interest and support in this and the chairman of the subcommittee, the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER), who provided extraordinary cooperation, I am deeply grateful, as well as, of course, our Ranking Members, the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS) of the subcommittee, and the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. GEJDENSON), our Ranking Member. I very much appreciate the cooperation.

I think it should be borne in mind that but for these Hmong Americans many other U.S. lives would have been lost during the Vietnam conflict, and I think it behooves us to, in fact, step up and to speak to the human rights of the people that remain in Southeast Asia, especially these Hmong Americans who are in Laos and who are suffering under these consequences. These promises on paper do not mean anything unless they are translated into reality in terms of what is happening to the people, the minorities, in Laos.

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

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. VENTO) for his supportive and kind remarks.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BALLENGER). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 169, as amended.

The question was taken.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

EXPRESSING UNITED STATES POLICY TOWARD THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 165) expressing United States policy toward the Slovak Republic.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 165

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring),

SECTION 1. FINDINGS.

The Congress finds the following:

(1) Elections held in May 1999 brought the first ever popularly elected President of the Slovak Republic to office and demonstrated the commitment of the Slovak people to full economic reforms, democratic government, and western ideals.

(2) The parliamentary elections held in September 1998 brought to office a coalition government in the Slovak Republic which has shown its commitment to economic reforms through economic austerity measures approved in May 1999, increased foreign investments through privatization of markets that were formerly state controlled, and discipline in government and currency policies.

(3) The Government of the Slovak Republic formed after the elections of September 1998 has renewed efforts to ensure the proper treatment of its citizens, regardless of ethnic background, including those of ethnic Hungarian background through the placement of three ethnic Hungarians in the cabinet of the Government (including the Deputy Premier for Human and Minority Rights), and through the passage of the Minority Language Use Act on July 10, 1999, in accordance with European Union guidelines, which will take effect on September 1, 1999, to protect the rights of all citizens.

(4) The Government of the Slovak Republic has made Slovakia's integration into pan-European and trans-Atlantic institutions, including the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the highest foreign policy priority, and through active participation with the Visegrad Four, the Slovak Republic has undertaken efforts to promote stability in the region.

(5) The Government of the Slovak Republic has stated its continuing support for the mission of NATO in supporting democratization and stability across Europe, and the Government demonstrated its commitment to these principles by fully cooperating with NATO during the recent conflict in Kosovo, allowing NATO full access to Slovak airspace, highways, and railways.

(6) The Slovak Republic subsequently provided military engineers to assist the peacekeeping force of NATO in Kosovo (KFOR), approved a \$2,000,000 humanitarian aid package for Kosovo, and housed over 100 refugees from the conflict.

(7) The Government of the Slovak Republic has continually worked to retain civilian control of its military through participation with NATO forces and has been an active participant in the Partnership-for-Peace program.

(8) The Slovak Republic has provided military personnel for participation in and support of multinational peacekeeping operations such as the United Nations operations in Rwanda and Liberia.

SEC. 2. POLICY TOWARD THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC.

It is the policy of the United States—

(1) to promote the development in the Slovak Republic of a market-based economy and a democratic government that respects the rights of all of its citizens, regardless of ethnic background; and

(2) to support the eventual integration of the Slovak Republic into pan-European and trans-Atlantic economic and security institutions.

SEC. 3. SENSE OF THE CONGRESS.

It is the sense of the Congress that—

(1) the Government of the Slovak Republic formed after the elections of September 1998 is to be commended—

(A) for its efforts to address the issue of proper treatment of its citizens, regardless of ethnic background, particularly those of ethnic Hungarian background;

(B) for its efforts to improve the economic situation in the Slovak Republic and for its efforts to accelerate the privatization of state-owned enterprises in a fair and transparent process; and

(C) for its support for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the recent conflict in Kosovo;

(2) the Government of the Slovak Republic should continue to implement programs that may qualify the Slovak Republic for entrance into the European Union and NATO and is to be commended for its continued support of the NATO effort to ensure stability and democratization across Europe; and

(3) the United States should support efforts for the eventual integration of the Slovak Republic into pan-European and trans-Atlantic institutions and should view such integration as an important factor in consolidating democratic government and economic stability in the Slovak Republic.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN) and the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on House Concurrent Resolution 165.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in support of House Concurrent Resolution 165 and to have joined the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MICA) in introducing this measure earlier this year.

Slovakia is an important country in the region of Central and Eastern Europe; and for that reason, our Nation and our allies in the North Atlantic Alliance and the European Union have sought to build a stronger relationship with Slovakia.

The collapse of communism is, however, a mere 10 years behind us, and the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe in 1989 was just the start of a very difficult process for Slovakia and for many other countries in that region. Even the most prosperous of those countries, new democracies like Poland, like Hungary, and the Czech Republic, continue to face difficult issues and challenges to reforms. But Slovakia has had an added challenge, it has not really existed as an independent state for hundreds of years.

After becoming independent in 1993, the newly independent state of Slovakia then experienced a political struggle that ensued between those who want to integrate Slovakia into pan-European and transatlantic institutions by carrying out real reforms, and those who, while calling for such integration, actually made such reforms difficult to achieve.

The parliamentary elections of September 1998 brought to power a new coalition government, a government that appears to be working toward implementing genuine reform and ensuring that the rights of all the citizens of Slovakia are respected regardless of ethnic background.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this resolution is a timely expression of our support for the new government in Slovakia and for the process of economic and political reforms in that country. It also makes it clear that the United States supports Slovakia's eventual integration into the pan-European and transatlantic community of Democratic states.

Mr. Speaker, I fully support the passage of this resolution, and I urge my colleagues to join in support.

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

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume, and I rise in strong support of this resolution.

First of all, I want to commend my friend and colleague, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MICA), for taking the initiative in introducing this resolution.

Mr. Speaker, Central and Eastern Europe constitutes one of the most complex, intriguing, and difficult parts of this globe; and the Slovak Republic is no exception. During the Second World War, an independent fascist established Slovak Republic had a singularly dismal record, resulting in the mass murder of innocent people and the enthusiastic participation in Hitler's war efforts.

For a long period during the Cold War, Slovakia, then part of the Czechoslovakia, represented an oppressive Communist dictatorship. And while there was a brief period in 1968, commonly referred to as the Prague spring, during which communism attempted to put on a human face, forces of repression prevailed. During the last months of the Cold War, Czechoslovakia represented one of the most repressive Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe.

□ 1500

With the leadership of Vaclav Havel, who was joined by both Czech and Slovak democrats, a Velvet Revolution unfolded and Czechoslovakia became part of the democratic world. Shortly thereafter, these two parts of Czechoslovakia separated peacefully.

I think history will long remember the dramatic difference between the peaceful separation of the Czech and Slovak republics and the bloody separation of the constituent republics of the former Yugoslavia.

For years, Slovakia was run by an individual of no democratic convictions, a man by the name of Meciar. Those of us who had the opportunity of visiting with him in Bratislava time and time again were appalled at his total failure, unwillingness, or inability to understand the new winds of democracy that are blowing throughout Europe.

Last year, new parliamentary elections were held in Slovakia and a democratic coalition government came to power. We are here to congratulate and wish the very best to that democratic government.

Earlier this year, Mr. Speaker, the people of the Slovak Republic chose in free elections their first ever popularly elected president; and we are here to salute him.

The new government of the Slovak Republic has recognized the equal rights of all ethnic minorities. It has recognized the importance of the freedom of religion, freedom of press, freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom to create political organizations to provide a vehicle for the people of Slovakia to advocate their views.

During the recent engagement in Kosovo, the Slovak authorities granted NATO full access to Slovak airspace, highways and railways; and Slovakia provided military engineers to assist in our peacekeeping efforts in Kosovo.

The greatest hope of the Slovak people at this time is to be fully inte-

grated into Europe and to be accepted into NATO. If they continue in their democratic ways, which we are so delighted and pleased to observe on a daily basis, it is certainly our hope that the European Union will welcome them as a full and free member of the newly united democratic Europe; and, in due time, they will be entitled to NATO membership and participation, which will strengthen their security and add to the collective strength of NATO.

I strongly support this resolution, Mr. Speaker.

Let me just say, in conclusion, that last week a few of us had the pleasure of meeting the new prime minister of Slovakia, who represents the best democratic tradition of central and Eastern Europe. We look forward to working with him and with his government in making Slovakia a full, effective, and democratic member of a united and democratic Europe.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MICA) helped to arrange a CODEL visit for us to Slovakia last year at about this time. It was at his insistence that we were the first CODEL delegation to visit Slovakia since its independence. And we were grateful for that opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MICA), the sponsor of this resolution.

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank and express my appreciation to the gentleman from New York (Chairman GILMAN) for both his expeditious consideration and handling of this resolution today and also for his personal support of Slovakia as it moves forward to take its place among the universe of free, independent, and democratic nations.

It is my honor, as an American of Slovak heritage, to speak in support of and also to help author House Concurrent Resolution 165.

I also want to pay tribute to the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS), serving as the ranking member of the Committee on International Relations, and thank him for his kind words in support of this resolution and also in support of the great progress the Slovak Republic and Slovak people have made in the last few years.

There are a few people on the Committee on International Relations or in the Congress who are more familiar with this area than the gentleman from California, so his words are particularly well taken today.

Mr. Speaker, neither fate nor history could provide a better time than today, November 16, for consideration of this resolution by the United States Congress. It was exactly 10 years ago today

that Slovak students took to the streets of their capital, the city of Bratislava, to demonstrate against Communist domination and plead for freedom and self-rule.

This month in the Slovak and also in the Czech capitals, the two presidents of those nations, their citizens, world leaders, and even our United States Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, will gather to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution.

And just in Washington during the past few weeks, we have been celebrating from the White House to the Congress to Embassy Row that special revolution that took place in the Czech and Slovak Republic. That occasion and this resolution by Congress are special for every one of the millions of Slovak Americans and also for the people of the Slovak Republic.

This resolution properly recognizes the accomplishments of Slovakia's government during the past year. What many fail to comprehend or understand is the centuries of domination and difficulty that have been endured by the Slovak people to reach this day of recognition.

After a millennium of domination from Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Moscow and Berlin, the sovereign Slovak Republic now stands as an independent, free, and democratic nation. Despite incredible attempts over those centuries to destroy the culture, heritage, and language of the Slovak people, their spirit has somehow miraculously survived.

Since January 1, 1993, its first day of independence, Slovakia has worked to align itself with free markets and with Western security arrangements. With the great progress that we recognize in this resolution, it is my hope and the prayer of many that Slovakia will take its rightful place among the most respected nations of the world.

Last week, the Slovak Republic's prime minister, Mikulas Dzurinda, placed the first bust of a patriot and freedom fighter in the Ronald Reagan Building's Woodrow Wilson Center. Thirty-one years ago, that Slovak freedom fighter, Alexander Dubcek, held the 1968 rebellion against Communism that was crushed by Soviet tanks.

Today, we in Congress hope to remove some of those last shackles that have held back the Slovak people. It is my hope that this resolution will honor them as they march forward to meet their rightful destiny.

I would like to at this time also pay some very special recognition to the first popularly elected Slovak president, Rudolph Schuster. As my colleagues heard, they elected their first independent president by popular election this spring.

I would also like to recognize the accomplishments of Prime Minister Dzurinda, the former United States

ambassador Ralph Johnson, the former Slovak ambassador Lichardus, and current Ambassador Butora and all of the Slovak parliamentarians from each of their parties who helped make this progress possible.

Finally, the location of Slovakia in Europe is critical to the future of NATO and our Western security alliances.

Please note, and I brought this along because many people do not know where Slovakia is, but it was part of the Czech Republic. It is located between Poland, Hungary, and Austria. Its capital, Bratislava, is less than 40 miles from Vienna. And we can see with that strategic location that it is so important that the Czech Republic, that Poland and Hungary, which are now part of NATO, have also included the Slovak Republic, which is in this island in between.

For the future security of both Slovakia and this region, it is indeed important that we support Slovakia as it seeks to join Western security and international free markets in the West.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, in closing debate on our side, I too want to remember those heady days 10 years ago when the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GEPHARDT), the distinguished Democratic leader, and I visited the capital of the then Czech-Slovak Republic. We had the opportunity of marching with the students as they were demanding democracy, as they were calling for their hero, Vaclav Havel, to be placed in the palace up on the hill, symbolically demonstrating that at long last democracy has returned to the Czech-Slovak Republic.

It is indeed a joyous occasion when a democratic Czech Republic and the democratic Slovak Republic can come to the United States to be honored and congratulated for their achievements.

As we close this debate, we all wish the Czech people and the Slovak people a truly democratic and prosperous future.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, as chairman of the Helsinki Commission, I watched for several years as the human rights situation in Slovakia deteriorated under the leadership of former Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar. I saw how the fledgling democratic institutions of that new country were undermined, how parliamentary and constitutional processes were threatened, and how the rule of law was slowly but surely choked. I, joined by colleagues from the Commission, raised these issues time and again with Slovak officials, as did other officials of the U.S. Government. Unfortunately, Mr. Meciar was not very receptive to our arguments.

As it happened, however, the fate of the democratic process in Slovakia was not left to the tender mercies of Vladimir Meciar. A year ago, the people of Slovakia took matters into

their own hands. In an election carefully monitored by the OSCE, voters returned to office a coalition government that ended Meciar's increasingly authoritarian rule.

Initially, this broadly based—some might even say weak—coalition seemed to stand only for one thing: it was against Meciar. But in the year that has passed, we can not say that this government is not simply united in its opposition against the former regime, it is united in its commitment for democracy, for the rule of law, for a free market economy, for a transparent privatization process that is accountable to the people, and for a community of democracies dedicated to the protection of their common security.

Mr. Speaker, the process of transition that Slovakia struggles with today is not an easy one. In fact, many of the commemorations held this month to celebrate the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of communism have focused on just how difficult this transition has been, including for Slovakia's closest neighbors. In spite of this, the Slovak Government has proceeded to make some very tough decisions this year. I am particularly impressed by the willingness of Prime Minister Dzurinda to make decisions that, while necessary for the long term, economic well-being of his country, may be very politically unpopular in the short term. That takes courage.

I know, of course, that Slovakia still has a lot of work ahead. As in most other European countries, there is much that should be done in Slovakia to improve respect for the human rights of the Romani minority. But there is much that Slovakia has accomplished in the past year and—especially as someone who has been critical of Slovakia in the past—I want to acknowledge and commend those achievements. Mr. Speaker, I hope others will join me in sending this message and will support H. Con. Res. 165.

Mr. STUPAK. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to be able to speak on behalf of this resolution. I trace my own ancestry to an area of what is now the Slovak Republic, and I watch with interest and concern developments in this area of Europe.

There are dangers and threats to these new democracies, which were created from the totalitarian governments of the former Soviet satellite nations. These threats stem from economic disparities, disappointment in the pace of growth, old ethnic animosities, and untested political structures.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, it is important that the Congress of the United States, the world's foremost democracy, commend the government of the Slovak Republic for its efforts to address the issue of minority rights and improve the economic well-being of all its citizens.

I would also like to commend the former government of Vladimir Meciar for its role in guiding the Slovak Republic through its early days of democracy. I know that politics often sharpens the public dialogues and that the many voices of democracy often contain words of rancor and ill-will. However, as outside observers, we can look with favor—and favor with our praise—peaceful transitions of power and the subservience of the machinery of government to the will of the people.

I encourage all my colleagues to support this resolution with the same hope that I feel

for the future of the Slovak Republic, of Eastern Europe, and of young democracies everywhere.

I look forward to that best measure of success, the full integration of the Slovak Republic into the community of Europe.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SHIMKUS). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution, H. Con. Res. 165.

The question was taken.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

EXPRESSING GRAVE CONCERN REGARDING ARMED CONFLICT IN NORTH CAUCASUS REGION OF RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 206) expressing grave concern regarding armed conflict in the North Caucasus region of the Russian Federation which has resulted in civilian casualties and internally displaced persons, and urging all sides to pursue dialog for peaceful resolution of the conflict, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 206

Whereas during the Russo-Chechen War of 1994-1996, Russian Federation military forces used massive force against civilians in Chechnya, causing immense human casualties, gross human rights violations, large-scale displacement of individuals, and destruction of property;

Whereas Chechnya has been the site of internal lawlessness and numerous kidnappings, including that of United States citizen Fred Cuny, whose exact fate is still unknown;

Whereas in recent months, extremist forces based in Chechnya have mounted armed incursions into the adjacent Russian Federation Republic of Dagestan and attempted to establish a political entity there against the wishes of the majority of the population of Dagestan;

Whereas almost 300 persons have died as a result of unsolved terrorist bombings in Russia that coincided with the armed incursions into Dagestan and Russian authorities have attributed the terrorist bombings to Chechen insurgents;

Whereas the United States recognizes the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation;

Whereas Russian Federation armed forces have conducted armed attacks against Chechnya and positioned forces with the stated intention of sealing Chechnya's borders and creating a security zone in the region;

Whereas such attacks and indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force have

harmed innocent civilians and given rise to over 100,000 internally displaced persons, most of whom have escaped into neighboring regions of Russia;

Whereas such indiscriminate attacks are a violation of paragraph 19 of the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security, approved at the 1994 Summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, held in Budapest, Hungary, which states that in the event of armed conflict, participating States "will seek to create conditions favorable to the political solution of the conflict. They will cooperate in support of humanitarian assistance to alleviate suffering among the civilian population, including facilitating the movement of personnel and resources to such tasks", and paragraph 36, which states, "If recourse to force cannot be avoided in performing internal security missions, each participating State will ensure that its use must be commensurate with the needs for enforcement. The armed forces will take due care to avoid injury to civilians or their property.";

Whereas the conflict in the North Caucasus may threaten democratic development, the rule of law, and respect for human rights throughout Russia;

Whereas authorities in Moscow and other cities of the Russian Federation have used terrorist bombings as a pretext to intensify a campaign against individuals from the North Caucasus region, including the detention and forcible expulsion of such individuals from these cities; and

Whereas in response to Russian attacks the elected Government of Chechnya has declared its solidarity with renegade Chechen forces in opposing Russian attacks: Now, therefore, be it

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

(1) urges the Government of the Russian Federation and all parties to cease the indiscriminate use of force against the civilian population in Chechnya, in accordance with commitments of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe;

(2) urges all parties, including the Government of the Russian Federation, to enter into negotiations on the North Caucasus conflict with legitimate political representatives of the region, including President Maskhadov and his Government, and to avail itself of the conflict prevention and crisis management capabilities of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which helped broker an end to the 1994-1996 War;

(3) urges the Chechen authorities to use every appropriate means to deny extremist forces located in its territory a base of operations for the mounting of armed incursions that threaten peace and stability in the North Caucasus region;

(4) urges the Chechen authorities to create a rule of law environment with legal norms based upon internationally accepted standards;

(5) cautions that forcible resettlement of internally displaced persons would evoke outrage from the international community;

(6) urges that the Government of the Russian Federation seek and accept international humanitarian assistance to alleviate the suffering of the internally displaced persons from Chechnya, so as to reduce the risk of civilian casualties; and

(7) calls on the Government of the United States to express to all parties the necessity of resolving the conflict peacefully, with full respect to the human rights of all the citizens of the Russian Federation, and to sup-

port the provision of appropriate international humanitarian assistance.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN) and the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on H. Con. Res. 206.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I support the resolution introduced by our colleague, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH). I believe that it makes important points with regard to the current hostility in the region of Chechnya and Russia.

□ 1515

Most importantly, this measure calls attention to the tens of thousands of innocent civilians who are suffering terribly due to the Russian government's indiscriminate use of force, and that Russia is violating its own commitments as a member state of the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe. This resolution states the obvious.

A peaceful settlement is what is required in Chechnya if the suffering of those innocent civilians is to end soon. This resolution also states, and I think quite appropriately, that there has been a wave of internal lawlessness and kidnappings within Chechnya in recent years and an armed attack on a neighboring region of Russian by extremist forces from Chechnya. Although that does not excuse the current military actions by Russia in Chechnya, it underlines why there is no clear consensus yet as to what the international community should do with regard to this latest conflict in that region.

However, I would like to take this opportunity to state my belief that the latest Russian military offensive will very likely do little to address the underlying causes of instability in the North Caucasus region and indeed throughout Russia. Those underlying problems include vast corruption at all levels of the Russian government and an absence of real economic reforms, allowing the North Caucasus region to slip into grinding poverty that is in turn breeding yet more instability.

This resolution, Mr. Speaker, makes several important statements; but I would specifically point out the resolution's statement that Russia's use of indiscriminate force in Chechnya is in direct violation of its commitments as a member state of the Organization on