REMEMBERING THE TRAGEDY OF KHOJALY

HON. DAN BURTON

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 17, 2005

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, for years a number of distinguished Members of this House have come to the Floor of this Chamber every April to commemorate the so-called Armenian Genocide—the exact details of which are still very much under debate today almost 90 years after the events. Ironically and tragically, none of these Members has ever once mentioned the ethnic cleansing carried out by the Armenians during the Armenia-Azerbaijan war which ended a mere decade ago.

Khojaly was a little known small town in Azerbaijan until February 1992. Today it no longer exists, and for people of Azerbaijan and the region, the word ''Khojaly'' has become synonymous with pain, sorrow, and cruelty. On February 26, 1992, the world ended for the people of Khojaly when Armenian troops supported by a Russian infantry regiment did not just attack the town but they razed it to the ground. In the process the Armenians brutally murdered 613 people, annihilated whole families, captured 1275 people, left 1,000 civilians maimed or crippled, and another 150 people unaccounted for in their wake.

Memorial, a Russian human rights group, reported that ''scores of the corpses bore traces of profanation. Doctors on a hospital train in Agdam noted no less than four corpses that had been scalped and one that had been beheaded. . . . and one case of live scalping:''

Various other witnesses reported horrifying details of the massacre. The late Azerbaijani journalist Chingiz Mustafayev, who was the first to film the aftermath of the massacre, wrote an account of what he saw. He said, ''Some children were found with severed ears; the skin had been cut from the left side of an elderly woman's face; and men had been scalped.''

Human Rights Watch called the tragedy at the time ''the largest massacre to date in the conflict.''

The New York Times wrote about ''truckloads of bodies'' and described acts of ''scalping.''

This savage cruelty against innocent women, children and the elderly is unfathomable in and of itself but the senseless brutality did not stop with Khojaly. Khojaly was simply the first. In fact, the level of brutality and the unprecedented atrocities committed at Khojaly set a pattern of destruction and ethnic cleansing that Armenian troops would adhere to for the remainder of the war. On November 29, 1993, Newsweek quoted a senior US Government official as saying ''What we see now is a systematic destruction of every village in their (the Armenians) way. It's vandalism.''

This year, as they have every year since the massacre, the leaders of Azerbaijan's Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities issue appeals on the eve of commemoration of the massacre of Khojaly urging the international community to condemn the February 26, 1992 bloodshed, facilitate liberation of the occupied territories and repatriation of the displaced communities.

And every year, those residents of Khojaly, who survived the massacre—many still scattered among one million refugees and displaced persons in camps around Azerbaijan—appeal with pain and hope to the international community to hold Armenia responsible for this crime.

I am pleased to say that on January 25, 2005 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe overwhelmingly adopted a resolution highlighting that ''considerable parts of Azerbaijan's territory are still occupied by the Armenian forces and separatist forces are still in control of the Nagorno-Karabakh region.'' It also expressed concern that the military action between 1988 and 1994 and the widespread ethnic hostilities which preceded it, ''led to large-scale ethnic expulsion and the creation of mono-ethnic areas which resemble the terrible concept of ethnic cleansing.''

Mr. Speaker, this is not the ringing condemnation that the survivors of Khojaly deserve but it is an important first step by an international community that has too long been silent on this issue. Congress should take the next step and I hope my colleagues will join me in standing with Azerbaijanis as they commemorate the tragedy of Khojaly. The world should know and remember.

INTRODUCTION OF THE ''VIDEO DESCRIPTION RESTORATION ACT OF 2005''

HON. EDWARD J. MARKEY

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 17, 2005

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce the ''Video Description Restoration Act of 2005.'' Mr. Speaker, we have a long history in telecommunications policy of trying to ensure that the benefits of technology reach all segments of American society. Our policies, enacted by Congress and implemented by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), has sought to further the three principal goals of telecommunications policy, namely, universal service, diversity, and localism—even as such policy objectives are buffeted by rapid technological change and competition.

For instance, in the late 1980s, the Telecommunications Subcommittee enacted legislation to include a decoder chip in all televisions to ensure that the deaf and hard-of-hearing community had affordable access to closed captioning. While the industry opposed such efforts as being too costly, with exaggerated claims of how much the price of televisions would rise as a result of this mandate, the technology cost was minimal and now turns out to be about a dollar a set. The FCC's video description rules were designed to similarly serve a community, in this case the blind community, in a modest effort to ensure that television was available to that community. Video description is the insertion of narration about the visual setting and background when that information is not already included in the audio portion of the program. Because television is a mainstay for information, news, and family-oriented viewing in the home, it is important that steps are taken, in furtherance of longstanding universal service goals, to reach the blind community.

This bill would restore the video programming rules. Recently the DC Circuit Court of Appeals invalidated the rules, alleging that the Commission did not have sufficient authority to promulgate such rules. Passage of this legislation would remove any ambiguity. I believe Congress ought to give the Commission clear guidance that such rules should be reinstated in a way that no court could question the intent of Congress that the Commission should have such authority. Moreover, by approving such legislation, Congress can also establish that such video description rules do not regulate content in violation of any Constitutional protections. Broadcasters are free to air whatever content they wish over the course of a week. The video description rules simply require that a modest portion of such speech be made available to all listeners, including those who cannot see. The regulations would not stipulate which speech is acceptable, favored, or otherwise and broadcasters can choose which speech they wish to make available to the blind community. In fact, rather than infringing upon speech, the rules celebrate it, essentially saying that such speech is so important, so valued, that more Americans deserve to be able to hear it over their public airwaves, as broadcast by public licensees who are required by law to serve the public interest.

Mr. Speaker, I hope the House will move legislation this year to re-instate these important video description rules and look forward to working with all of my colleagues on this issue in the weeks and months ahead.

HONORING FIDEL GONZALEZ

HON. ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 17, 2005

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to congratulate Mr. Fidel Gonzalez.

Fidel Gonzalez practiced law in Cuba and defended many dissidents of the Fidel Castro regime.

Among his various activities in the United States, he has worked as a social worker in the city of New York's Social Welfare Program.

He studied nights and weekends at Fordham University in New York, where he received a Master's Degree in Social Work and graduated with a high grade point average.

When he retired as a social worker, he began working with a well-known law firm in Union City.

In addition, Fidel Gonzalez was an outstanding leader of the Cuban Attorneys Delegation in New York and New Jersey.

He has been a member for many years of the Pan-American Culture Circle, where he has participated in their conferences as coordinator of the historic and literature sessions.