day after Members are notified to reassemble pursuant to section 2 of this concurrent resolution, whichever occurs first.

SEC. 2. The Speaker of the House and the Majority Leader of the Senate, acting jointly after consultation with the Minority Leader of the House and the Minority Leader of the Senate, shall notify the Members of the House and the Senate, respectively, to reassemble whenever, in their opinion, the public interest shall warrant it.


INTERNATIONAL CHILD ABDUCTION—HAUGE CONVENTION COMPLIANCE

Whereas the Department of State reports that at any given time there are 1,000 open cases of American children either abducted from the United States or wrongfully retained in a foreign country;

Whereas many more cases of international child abductions are not reported to the Department of State;

Whereas the situation has worsened since 1993, when Congress estimated the number of American children abducted from the United States and wrongfully retained in foreign countries to be more than 10,000;


Whereas the Hague Convention establishes mutual rights and duties between and among its contracting states to expedite the return of children to the state of their habitual residence, as well as to ensure that rights of custody and of access under the laws of one contracting state are effectively respected in other contracting states, without consideration of the merits of any underlying child custody dispute;

Whereas article 13 of the Hague Convention provides a narrow exception to the requirement for prompt return of children, which exception releases the requested state from its obligation to return a child to the country of the child’s habitual residence if it is established that there is a “grave risk” that the return would expose the child to “physical or psychological harm or otherwise place the child in an intolerable situation” or “if the child objects to being returned and has attained an age and degree of maturity at which it is appropriate to take account of the child’s views”;

June 23, 2000

[H. Con. Res. 293]
Whereas some contracting states, for example Germany, routinely invoke article 13 as a justification for nonreturn, rather than resorting to it in a small number of wholly exceptional cases;

Whereas the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), the only institution of its kind, was established in the United States for the purpose of assisting parents in recovering their missing children;

Whereas article 21 of the Hague Convention provides that the central authorities of all parties to the Convention are obligated to cooperate with each other in order to promote the peaceful enjoyment of parental access rights and the fulfillment of any conditions to which the exercise of such rights may be subject, and to remove, as far as possible, all obstacles to the exercise of such rights;

Whereas some contracting states fail to order or enforce normal visitation rights for parents of abducted or wrongfully retained children who have not been returned under the terms of the Hague Convention; and

Whereas the routine invocation of the article 13 exception, denial of parental visitation of children, and the failure by several contracting parties, most notably Austria, Germany, Honduras, Mexico, and Sweden, to fully implement the Convention deprives the Hague Convention of the spirit of mutual confidence upon which its success depends: Now, therefore, be it

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

(1) all contracting parties to the Hague Convention, particularly European civil law countries that consistently violate the Hague Convention such as Austria, Germany and Sweden, to comply fully with both the letter and spirit of their international legal obligations under the Convention;

(2) all contracting parties to the Hague Convention to ensure their compliance with the Hague Convention by enacting effective implementing legislation and educating their judicial and law enforcement authorities;

(3) all contracting parties to the Hague Convention to honor their commitments and return abducted or wrongfully retained children to their place of habitual residence without reaching the merits of any underlying custody dispute and ensure parental access rights by removing obstacles to the exercise of such rights;

(4) the Secretary of State to disseminate to all Federal and State courts the Department of State’s annual report to Congress on Hague Convention compliance and related matters; and

(5) each contracting party to the Hague Convention to further educate its central authority and local law enforcement authorities regarding the Hague Convention, the severity of the problem of international child abduction, and the need for immediate action when a parent of an abducted child seeks their assistance.

Agreed to June 23, 2000.
WHEREAS the United States has a vital interest in the promotion of democracy abroad and supports democracy and economic development in the Republic of Belarus;

WHEREAS in the Fall of 1996, Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka devised a controversial referendum to impose a new constitution on Belarus and abolish the Parliament, the 13th Supreme Soviet, replacing it with a rubber-stamp legislature;

WHEREAS President Lukashenka organized a referendum in violation of the 1994 Belarusian Constitution, which illegally extended his term of office to 2001;

WHEREAS Lukashenka’s legal term in office expired in July 1999;

WHEREAS Belarus has effectively become an authoritarian police state, where human rights are routinely violated;

WHEREAS Belarusian economic development is stagnant and living conditions are deplorable;

WHEREAS in May 1999, the Belarusian opposition challenged Lukashenka’s unconstitutional lengthening of his term by staging alternative presidential elections, unleashing the government crackdown;

WHEREAS the leader of the opposition, Semyon Sharetsky, was forced to flee Belarus to the neighboring Baltic state of the Republic of Lithuania in fear for his life;

WHEREAS several leaders of the opposition, including Viktor Gonchar, Anatoly Krasovsky, and Yuri Zakharenka have disappeared;

WHEREAS the Belarusian regime harasses and persecutes the independent media and works to actively suppress freedom of speech;

WHEREAS former Prime Minister Mikhail Chygir, who was a candidate in the opposition’s alternative presidential elections in May 1999, was held in pretrial detention on trumped up charges from April through November 1999;

WHEREAS the Lukashenka regime provoked the clashes between riot police and demonstrators at the October 17, 1999, “Freedom March”, which resulted in injuries to demonstrators and scores of illegal arrests;

WHEREAS hundreds of peaceful demonstrators and over 30 journalists were arrested during a March 25, 2000, pro-democracy rally in Minsk, once again illustrating the Lukashenka regime’s disregard for freedom of assembly, association, and information;

WHEREAS the Lukashenka regime has refused to engage in meaningful dialogue with the opposition and has used the tactics of delay and obfuscation in disregarding the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)-mediated dialogue process;

WHEREAS genuine dialogue with the opposition and legitimate, free and fair elections cannot take place in the present climate of repression and fear existing in Belarus;

WHEREAS on April 3, 1996, Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin and President Lukashenka signed an agreement to form a Union State of Russia and Belarus;