

June 3, 2009

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H. Res. 489, recognizing the twentieth anniversary of the Tiananmen Square crackdown. In June of 1989, the Chinese government unnecessarily applied the heavy hand of the People's Liberation Army to violently suppress peaceful demonstrators who were calling for an elimination of corruption, the expansion of freedoms, and progress toward political and economic reforms. Twenty years later, there still has been no accurate accounting of those who were killed or injured, and we do not know how many hundreds or thousands of activists remain imprisoned. But we do know that thousands living in exile and millions living in China are unable to freely express themselves in their home country, where censorship and repression still drown out peaceful calls for reform.

The People's Republic of China is a proud nation that increasingly is taking its place on the world stage. But if China wants to be fully integrated into the community of nations, it must recognize that the persecution of peaceful movements is unacceptable, and it must act to reverse the objectionable and counterproductive policies exemplified by the Tiananmen Square crackdown. Violations of human rights and international standards of law are not behavior consistent with a modern nation that wants to contribute to the world of international exchange, global trade, and academic cooperation.

The freedoms of expression and assembly are universal rights, and the flames of these liberties burn in all mankind. Today, we speak for the brave voices who were wrongfully silenced 20 years ago, for the families who have been unable to publicly mourn the loss of their loved ones, and for all those who continue to stand up for free expression in China and around the world. I fervently hope that this effort will hasten the day that the unfettered voices of the Chinese people may be heard in Tiananmen Square and throughout China. For though freedom's flames may be smothered, its smoldering embers will always produce, as Martin Luther King put it, a certain kind of fire that no water can put out.