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Hello, I am Bob Filner, the Co-Chair of Iran Human Rights and Democracy Caucus in the House of Representatives.

First of all, let me congratulate all of Iranian friends here on the occasion of Nowrouz, the Iranian New Year. Let us hope that next year, we can celebrate in a free Iran.

Following the July assault by the Iraqi forces on the residents of Camp Ashraf, which left 11 killed and 500 wounded, I introduced H. Res. 704, a resolution in the House, which "deplores the ongoing violence by Iraqi security forces against the residents of Camp Ashraf; calls upon the Iraqi Government to live up to its commitment to the United States to ensure the continued well-being of those living in Camp Ashraf."

The resolution has been co-sponsored by bi-partisan majority members of the House, including 11 Committee Chairs and more than 30 members of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

The case of Ashraf is both a humanitarian and political issue. It is humanitarian as the lives of 3,400 residents, including 1,000 women, are in grave danger. These are protected persons under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

But it is also a political issue. The Iranian government is extremely concerned about the main Iranian opposition, the MEK, whose members are in Camp Ashraf, especially since Ashraf has acted as a source of inspiration for the millions in Iran, particularly women and youths, who have been demanding regime change. Therefore, increased suppression in Iran and attempt to destroy Camp Ashraf are two sides of the same coin: Tehran's unsuccessful drive to contain the uprising of the Iranian people.

Our government signed an agreement with each and every member of Camp Ashraf in 2004, committing itself to their protection until their final disposition, which is yet to be determined. Moreover, the U.S. Government handed over the protection of Ashraf to the Iraqi government after receiving written assurances that it will treat them humanely. Iraq has failed to uphold its obligations and our ambivalence in this respect only sets the stage for further bloodshed and another humanitarian catastrophe. We should do more than just act as an idle observer.

The crackdown on the Iranian opposition in Iraq goes hand in hand with Tehran's nefarious meddling in that country, as the mullahs have done their utmost to derail the democratic process in order to ensure their allies gain the upper hand in the elections.

As the administration grapples with what should be the best approach to the Iranian problem, it is clear that neither engagement nor a foreign military intervention represent viable options. The most effective and least costly option, in my view, is to promote democratic change by the Iranian people and their organized resistance.

I am pleased that a majority of my colleagues have co-sponsored this resolution which specifically asks the President "to take all necessary and appropriate steps to support the commitments of the United States under international law and treaty obligations to ensure the physical security and protection of Camp Ashraf residents against inhumane treatment and involuntary deportation by Iraqi security forces." The US government has both a legal as well as a moral obligation to secure the safety and security of residents of Ashraf. As I indicated, I believe that it is also the right policy vis-à-vis Iran. We should stand on the side of the Iranian people and not the tyrants ruling Iran.

Along those lines, the administration should encourage the United Nations to play a much more active role in so far as it concerns Camp Ashraf and strengthen the role of a monitoring a UN monitoring team in Ashraf to one of protecting the residents to ensure that their rights and safety are respected and all the inhumane restrictions placed on them by the Iraqi government are lifted.

Again, let's celebrate Nourooz and the coming of a new year. Thank you.