



Remarks by Congressman Joe Moakley

Mr. Speaker: Let me close with an appeal to both the conscience and wisdom of Members on both sides of the aisle.

Today, by retaining my provision, we have an opportunity to uphold our country's commitment to provide safe haven for the innocent victims of war. We also have an opportunity to act upon our deep moral obligation to protect innocent victims.

I think it is particularly appropriate that we take this action in the case of El Salvador. For ten long years these brave people of El Salvador -- men, women and children -- have suffered the agony of the destruction of their homeland, the violation of their human rights and the arbitrary killing of their loved ones.

Mr. Speaker, El Salvador is the size of my state of Massachusetts. Over 70,000 civilians have been killed in the last decade. It is only human that people who live in fear will flee, seeking safety for their children and families. How can we deny their human needs and our moral obligations?

Mr. Speaker, just last week, Salvadoran President Cristiani reiterated his strong support for this measure. He recognizes that the continuing war in his tiny nation has displaced literally hundreds of thousands of his fellow countrymen who now desperately seek temporary protection.

The reality is that these people are here but without the protection of our laws. It is long past the time when we should acknowledge their presence and have our laws recognize and regulate this reality. Otherwise, we turn our backs on their humanitarian needs and on the importance that our immigration laws control this situation.

In the cases of Kuwait, Lebanon and Liberia, I have had urgent requests from colleagues to provide similar temporary protection for similar reasons. I agree that these people -- perhaps no more than 15,000 in total -- who are now here have an equal claim upon the conscience and goodwill of the American people. As we seek to restore human decency and peace in the Middle East -- as well as in Central America -- the least we can do is treat with respect and basic humanity nationals of these countries who now live among us.

The opponents of this measure argue like chicken little that the sky is falling and that if we enact this measure America will be overrun by people who somehow pose a threat to our well being. This is ludicrous and inhumane.

By its specific terms, only people already here today are entitled to temporary protected status. And these are good people, decent people, law abiding people who are committed to the safety of their families.

By its terms, this measure denies protection to anyone convicted of criminal activity or who would be inadmissible to the United States under our immigration laws.

By its terms, this measure provides no federal benefits to those it protects.

By its terms, this measure requires those who are covered to register with the proper authorities.

In addition, this measure establishes a statutory framework for future uses of safe haven protection. It ends the current ad hoc approach to dealing with people in need.

Mr. Speaker, these are good people we seek to protect. Somehow I think we owe it to them.

We also owe it to ourselves to enact this measure.

~~In closing~~ ^{Mr. Speaker} let me reiterate that America is the beacon of freedom and hope for the people of the world because of our values and respect for human life and dignity. This is what makes us great and unique in the community of nations.

We owe it to ourselves to practice what we preach.

We owe it to ourselves to uphold our country's traditions.

We owe it to our posterity to act today in a manner which will make our children proud.

Let it not be said that the America of 1990 does not have the heart and soul to provide this modest temporary protection to refugees from war.

Defeat the motion to strike -- and help save some lives.