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Senate

S 10358

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 55—RELATING TO THE PLIGHT OF ETHIOPIAN JEWS

Mr. TSONGAS (for himself, Mr. PERCY, Mr. METZENBAUM, Mr. CRANSTON, Mr. DODD, Mr. KENNEDY, Mr. MOYNIHAN, Mr. SARBANES, and Mr. LEVIN) submitted the following concurrent resolution:

S. CON. RES. 55

Resolved by the Senate (the House of Representatives concurring),

Whereas the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights guarantees to all persons the right to freedom of religion, the right to hold opinions without interference, the right to freedom from expulsion, and the right to emigrate:

Whereas Ethiopian Jews are among the oldest continuous Jewish communities in existence, their history extending back for three thousand years:

Whereas this community once numbered several hundred thousand persons, but the scourge of wars, pestilence, persecution, and famine over the years has reduced it to some twenty-five thousand people, several thousand of whom have sought refuge in nearby countries:

Whereas the American people are becoming increasingly aware of the difficulties facing Ethiopian Jews and are seeking ways to assist them; and

Whereas the plight of Ethiopian Jews demands that the American people and all people of good will do everything possible to alleviate their suffering: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the United States Senate (the House of Representatives concurring), That it is the sense of the Congress that the President should—

(1) express to relevant foreign governments the United States concern for the welfare of Ethiopian Jews, in particular their right to emigrate

(2) seek ways to assist Ethiopian Jews through every available means so that they may be able to emigrate freely, and

(3) express the concern of the American people for the welfare of the Ethiopian Jewish community in every appropriate forum

● Mr. TSONGAS. Mr. President, I am very proud indeed to introduce today a resolution urging the President to respond to the plight of Ethiopian Jews, known in Ethiopia as Falasha. I am pleased to name as original cosponsors of this resolution, Senators PELL, SARBANES, CRANSTON, DODD, PERCY, KENNEDY, MOYNIHAN, METZENBAUM, and LEVIN.

The Falasha—which means stranger or landless person—have lived in Ethiopia for over 2,000 years. They have maintained their Jewish traditions intact over this time, still speaking Hebrew, maintaining their Jewish

faith, and even observing dietary laws. Although the Falasha are not the victims today of targeted government persecution, their plight in Ethiopia is one of poverty, isolation, and insecurity. Many Falasha wish to make the aliyah to Israel. They are barred from doing so by Ethiopian law, which restricts emigration very tightly. Many Falasha have been arrested for violation of their law.

Yet, in spite of the enormous obstacles facing the Ethiopian Jews, many undertake the arduous journey to Israel, where I met with a community of Falasha in January of this year.

It is very important for the Senate to recognize and lend our support to the courageous efforts of Falasha to settle in Israel where they can practice their religion freely and fully.

The resolution I am introducing today is identical to that introduced by Congressmen SOLARZ and FRANK in the House of Representatives. It calls upon the President to “express to relevant governments the United States concern for the welfare of Ethiopian Jews, in particular their right to emigrate,” to seek ways to assist Ethiopian Jews so that they may emigrate freely, and to express the concern of the American people for the welfare of the Ethiopian Jews at every available forum.

There are, at last count, some 25,000 Falasha left in Ethiopia. Once there were several hundred thousand Ethiopian Jews, but over the years war and pestilence have drastically reduced their number. As one of the oldest continuous Jewish communities in the world, the Falasha are of special importance to us all.

I will never forget my meeting with Falasha immigrants in Israel. I spoke with the leader of their group, a priest or “cohen”, through interpreters who translated my English into Hebrew. At one point I became impatient with the slow pace of translated conversations, and I spoke in Amharic, the dominant language of Ethiopia. My host was both surprised and delighted to speak his second language once again. It was for me a particularly poignant experience, because it made very clear how much the Falasha cherish their country, Ethiopia, but whose longing to live in the Jewish State of Israel is even stronger.

This is a timeless and irresistible theme. I strongly believe the Senate should register its firm support.●

● Mr. PERCY. Mr. President, I am pleased to join Senator TSONGAS in

sponsoring a Senate concurrent resolution which expresses the grave concern of the Congress regarding the plight of Ethiopian Jews. The House Foreign Affairs Committee will soon consider an identical resolution by Congressman SOLARZ and I will urge that the Foreign Relations Committee schedule speedy consideration of the resolution.

Approximately 25,000 Ethiopian Jews are presently in Ethiopia and in neighboring refugee camps. They are descendants of a community which once numbered several hundred thousand. One of the oldest continuous Jewish communities in existence, with a heritage dating back 3,000 years, its survival is today threatened by war, pestilence, famine and neglect. Many of the Ethiopian Jews—the Falashas—want to emigrate, and need help to do so.

Through the work of the American Association for Ethiopian Jews and other concerned groups and individuals, many people are becoming aware of the critical state of this precious community of Jews. The AAJEJ has also played a leading role in garnering support for increased U.S. assistance to the victims of the drought now plaguing Ethiopia.

The U.S. Agency for International Development has been responsive to several requests for emergency disaster relief and additional contributions are still under review. It is hoped that they will be promptly approved.

The resolution expresses the interest of the Congress and asks the President to bring this U.S. concern to the attention of relevant foreign governments, especially regarding their right to emigrate. I hope that my colleagues will give their support to the resolution.●