

glass business. Recognizing the importance of his achievement to the black community in Los Angeles, Frank took the opportunity to share his knowledge and expertise with aspiring entrepreneurs by teaching at the Los Angeles Trade Technical College. He retired from the glass business in 1985 after more than 40 years in the profession.

Aside from his professional accomplishments and love for his family, Frank's other passion was his membership in the Prince Hall Affiliation of the California Jurisdiction and several other fraternal organizations. After many years of dedicated and exemplary service, the United Supreme Council honored him with the 33rd Degree—one of the highest honors that can be achieved in Masonry.

Frank was also active in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Los Angeles branch of the Urban League. A dedicated and devout Christian, Frank was a member of Los Angeles' famed Trinity Baptist Church for over fifty years. For more than thirty of those years, he served as a member of the Deacon Board, regularly and steadfastly participating in church projects, including the construction of Trinity's current sanctuary. In November 1997, during its 80th anniversary celebration, Trinity paid tribute to Frank for his selfless and enduring commitment to his church family.

Mr. Speaker, I was privileged to know Frank Brown; his and Odessa's daughter—Gwendolyn Brown Byrd—served as my Legislative Director for several years prior to her appointment as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health, Budgets and Programs at the Pentagon. He was a wonderful family man; a gentleman who instilled in his accomplished children the importance of family and commitment to public service and community. It is, therefore, fitting that his life be recognized in this manner. I ask that my colleagues join me in remembering his contribution to community and in extending our heartfelt condolences to his beloved family.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN BELARUS

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 5, 1998

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I—along with my colleagues Reps. GILMAN, WOLF, PORTER, HOYER and MARKEY—rise today to introduce a resolution voicing concern about serious limitations on human rights in Belarus, a country of 10 million people located in eastern Europe. Belarus has an old and rich—and often tragic—history. This century, the people of Belarus suffered the horror of both Nazi and Soviet totalitarianism. More recently, they were ravaged by the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster, the legacy of which profoundly haunts Belarus to this day. Today, the rights and liberties of the Belarusian people are being eroded by their own authorities.

As a participating State of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Belarus has pledged to abide by its commitments under the Helsinki Final Act and subsequent agreements of the OSCE. Yet since the election of President Alyaksandr

Lukashenka in 1994, basic rights and freedoms have come under increasing assault in clear violation of Belarus' freely undertaken commitments under the OSCE.

In an illegitimate November 1996 referendum to amend the 1994 Constitution, President Lukashenka amassed sweeping powers over parliament and the judiciary. In his quest for more power, Lukashenka has ignored the constitutionally established system of separation of powers. Virtually all power rests in the hands of Lukashenka, who has resorted to rule by decree. Following the 1996 referendum, Lukashenka disbanded the Supreme Soviet (parliament) and created a new legislature, which is largely subordinate to his authoritarian rule. The resolution I am introducing today urges President Lukashenka to restore the rights of the pre-November 1996 parliament, which, having been duly elected on the basis of democratic elections in 1995, is the only legitimate parliament in Belarus.

Similarly, Lukashenka has also undermined the judicial branch. The previously independent Constitutional Court has been brought entirely under his control, and independence of the judiciary in Belarus is no longer guaranteed.

Belarus has been rife with violations of human rights over the last few years, bringing to mind the bygone Soviet era. Freedoms of expression, and association and assembly are severely restricted. The state controls almost all media outlets. The few genuinely independent newspapers and radio stations have been harassed or shut down. Journalists critical of the regime have been denied accreditation; some have been jailed. Opposition leaders and other individuals who criticize the president or government have been intimidated, beaten, or detained. Non-governmental organizations face obstacles and have been subjected to harassment. The Belarusian Soros Foundation, for instance, which had donated some \$13 million to educational, humanitarian, cultural and media projects in Belarus, was forced to close its office there last September as a result of the Belarusian Government's orchestrated campaign of harassment. Demonstrations during the last few years have resulted in short-term detentions—with detainees held incommunicado—fines and police violence against demonstrators and even bystanders.

Mr. Speaker, one can provide a litany of specific instances, but allow me to highlight just two recent cases. Last August, police in the Belarusian town of Stolptsy detained 19-year-old Alexei Shidlauski and 16-year-old Vadim Labkovich—both members of the youth branch of the opposition Belarusian National Front. They were charged for "malicious hooliganism" for allegedly writing on walls appeals for freedom in Belarus and for replacing on several buildings the official red-green Belarusian flag with the red-white-red "independent" Belarusian flag, which President Lukashenka banned in 1995. The young men spent six months in pre-trial detention under very difficult conditions. Just last week, a Miensk court sentenced Vadim Labkovich to a one-and-a-half-year suspended prison term and Alexei Shidlauski to one-and-a-half-year prison term in a strict regime colony. Human Rights Watch, whose representatives were present at the trial, condemned the proceedings as a "show trial and a mockery of justice."

In late December, Yuri Khashchevatsky, an internationally renowned film director and a member of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee was beaten unconscious by two unidentified men, in what human rights observers strongly believe to be a politically-motivated assault. Khashchevatsky had directed a documentary film called "An Ordinary President", which is critical of President Lukashenka. The film won several international prizes, but has been effectively banned in Belarus. Mr. Speaker, I can cite numerous other instances of specific violations of human rights and civil liberties and the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Commission), which I Co-Chair, has detailed information concerning such violations. We have and we will continue to make our views about these matters known to the Belarusian government.

Mr. Speaker, all of the post-communist countries in the region face formidable obstacles in their transition to democratic states based on the rule of law. We recognize that the oppressive legacy of communism and of Soviet rule cannot be overcome overnight. Some of the post-communist countries have made greater progress towards reform; in others, progress has been more erratic, but in virtually all, there has been progress. Belarus, however, appears to be the only country in the region which has witnessed serious backsliding and a turn to the Soviet past. Immediately following its 1991 independence, Belarus appeared to be off to a good start in establishing its democratic credentials, but even those limited reforms have been reversed as Lukashenka has steadily tightened his grip.

Belarusian officials, including President Lukashenka, have complained about Belarus' isolation from the international community, as more and more countries and international bodies have taken Belarus to task over the curtailment of human rights and civil liberties there. The OSCE, for instance, has repeatedly called upon the Government of Belarus to respect human rights and democratic principles, to enter into dialogue with the opposition and to ensure freedom of the media. Lukashenka fails to realize the consequences of his actions and his government's failure to abide by international commitments. The international community has not isolated Belarus—President Lukashenka is isolating Belarus.

After nearly a year of difficult negotiations and several false starts, Belarus and the OSCE agreed to an OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group, which will assist the Belarusian authorities in promoting democratic institutions and in complying with other OSCE commitments. This Group, which is now commencing its work and which will be located in the Belarusian capital of Minsk, can play a truly constructive role in helping Belarus improve its human rights situation. Let me assure you that I will watch closely the willingness of the Belarusian Government to cooperate with the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group.

Mr. Speaker, If the Belarusian Government abides by its commitments under the Helsinki Final Act and subsequent OSCE agreements, its isolation from the international community will disappear and its relations, not only with the United States, but with its neighbors in the region, will improve dramatically.