Thank you for that kind introduction. And thank you for inviting me to speak at this wonderful event. I'm happy to look around and see so many here tonight and I am proud to call myself a friend of Lebanon. And I want to especially thank my good friend, Joe Gebeily, for working so hard to bring us together again this year.

8 years ago, something very important happened. After seeing their prime minister killed by a massive car bomb, the Lebanese people gathered and told their Syrian occupiers that they were not welcome anymore and reasserted control of their country. The images of the people pouring into the streets, their faces painted red, white, and green, waving the flag of their country is still inspiring. This was truly Lebanon's moment.

It is this remarkable event that we're here to commemorate tonight. Unfortunately, tonight's celebration is bittersweet. In the 8 years since the Cedar Revolution, Syria and Iran have rearmed Hezbollah and

through this proxy they continue to meddle in internal Lebanese affairs. In neighboring Syria, events continue to spiral out of control, as thousands have been slaughtered at the hands of the Assad regime.

I don't need to tell anyone here tonight that the Middle East is a complicated region with a complicated history. But if the events of the past couple of years have proven anything, it is that the peoples of the Middle East are not immune from the desire to be free from repression.

Tonight, however, we celebrate the bravery of the Lebanese people in fighting for their right to be free from outside influence and the right to live without fear. And while the Lebanese people have suffered recent setbacks, I have no doubt that there will be better days ahead.

You have many friends in this Congress and we stand with you. Thank you once again for inviting me to be

with you tonight. I look forward to continuing to be a friend of Lebanon.