Chairman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
REMARKS
8th Anniversary of Lebanon's Cedar Revolution
Thursday April 25, 2013
(As Prepared for Delivery)

It's a great honor and privilege to be here with so many distinguished guests and colleagues, and I thank you all for being here this evening as we gather to support the cause of a free and sovereign Lebanon.

I'd also like to extend a special thanks to the Lebanese-American Organizations who have once again put together such an impressive event to commemorate the anniversary of the Cedar Revolution.

Eight years have now passed since the Lebanese people courageously marched in the streets, calling for the return of freedom and independence in Lebanon.

They marched by the tens of thousands through the streets of Beirut to Martyrs Square, rallying for justice;

Justice for Rafik Hariri, and justice for all Lebanese who sought an end of the Syrian occupation.

Every week those who yearned for freedom and democracy marched undeterred in their cause; united and steadfast.

Yet they were not alone – their cause not limited to just those confined within the boundaries of Lebanon.
No, theirs was truly an international movement, for we are all well aware of how large the Lebanese Diaspora community is.

Right here in America we have the second largest Lebanese community outside of Lebanon, with well over 3 million calling United States home.

And many of the Lebanese Americans, some of whom are likely here with us today, joined in solidarity with those in Lebanon and waged their own demonstrations in support of the cause.

As did the Lebanese communities across the globe, from Australia to Germany, the UK and Canada – just to name a few.

And those efforts were successful – together, those who sought to cast off the yoke of Syrian oppression pressured Assad to remove his troops from Lebanon, ending Syria's 30 year presence in the country.

This was a struggle we were all in together; it is a struggle we are all still in together.

Congress has been fully supportive of the Lebanese people and their right to sovereignty, free from interference from Assad and his ally Iran, and their proxy – Hezbollah.

And though the Cedar Revolution succeeded in ousting Assad's military, Syria still refuses to recognize Lebanon's right as a sovereign nation.

It has used its proxy, Hezbollah, to foment turmoil and create instability within Lebanon, and the clashes in Syria only raise the already high tensions between the two nations, as Lebanon risks being dragged into this bloody Syrian conflict by Hezbollah.

The United States and all responsible nations must continue to do everything in our power to stop Hezbollah, and cut off its support, while at the same time ensuring that the extremist elements do not take hold in a post-Assad Syria.

That is why I was pleased to see that earlier this week the Treasury Department designated two Lebanese financial exchange institutions as primary money laundering concerns.

This move is a significant step aimed at cutting off Hezbollah's access to hard currency it receives through its illicit activities.

But that is not enough.

The Europeans must finally and unanimously target and identify Hezbollah as the true entity that it is, and label it as a terrorist organization.

And we all must stand resolutely behind those in Lebanon who denounce Hezbollah for its provocative actions, and stand against this terrorist organization as it violates Lebanese law and sovereignty.

We must also join with the people of Lebanon who have stood against tyranny and violence, and let them know that they are not alone; that we support their efforts for a free and democratic Lebanon.

And we must let those who seek a stable and independent state, free from Syrian interference, know that they cannot let Hezbollah, Iran or Syria co-opt their government and derail the democratic process.

The future of the upcoming elections in Lebanon is in doubt.

The people of Lebanon must not let the conflict in Syria, nor any other external force, derail the election process.

Doing so could potentially throw the country back into its own crisis.

The people of Lebanon deserve free, fair and transparent elections, and they must show the world that they are prepared for the upcoming elections, and that they can still fulfill the goals of the Cedar Revolution of 2005 – a free and sovereign Lebanon.

And the United States will continue to take whatever action necessary to support that cause.

Thank you.