Chairman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
REMARKS – As prepared for delivery
9th Anniversary of Lebanon's Cedar Revolution
Monday April 28, 2014 – 5:00pm; Rayburn B-340

I am honored to, once again, speak in front of so many friends and colleagues, and I thank you all for being here today as we commemorate the 9th anniversary of the Cedar Revolution.

I also would like to extend my deep appreciation and gratitude to the Lebanese-American Organizations and for their dedicated work to make this event such a success.

Just this month, my Subcommittee held a hearing on Lebanon's security challenges and U.S. interests moving forward.

The Lebanese people who bravely marched for freedom and justice in the face of Syrian oppression are a symbol of hope for many throughout this troubled region who hold similar democratic aspirations, and it is my privilege to express my unwavering support for their dream of a safe and sovereign Lebanon.

And they were not alone – as it was a truly international movement, for we are all well aware of how large the Lebanese Diaspora community is.

The United States has the world's second largest Lebanese community outside of Lebanon, with well over 3 million calling America their home.

Along with the support of many other Lebanese communities across the globe, from Australia to Germany, Canada and the UK, the Lebanese people pressured Assad to remove his troops from Lebanon, ending Syria's presence in Lebanon.

The Cedar Revolution showed other oppressed and freedom and democracy-seeking people within the region that it is possible to fight and win against the forces of oppression.

And several years later, we saw the Green Revolution unfold in 2009, where thousands of young people took to the streets to demand democratic reforms in Iran.

Unfortunately, we did not support these brave people and just stood idly by as the Ayatollah regime brutally massacred these peaceful demonstrators and imprisoned countless opponents.

We must support all people who truly seek democracy and freedom in this region.

And we must absolutely continue to support the people of Lebanon's quest for freedom and democracy.

And while we celebrate the Cedar Revolution's successful eradication of Assad's troops from within Lebanon, we cannot ignore the new threats the Lebanese people are facing today.

Threats from the instability and influx of foreign fighters brought on by the Syrian conflict next door, the deadly rise of sectarian violence in the region, and the ongoing danger posed by Iran's proxy – Hezbollah.

With over 150,000 dead and nearly 10 million people in need of dire humanitarian assistance, the ongoing conflict in Syria has created an almost unprecedented humanitarian crisis for the region, greatly affecting Lebanon's already fragile internal political situation.

Just recently, the United Nations Refugee Agency announced that the number of Syrian refugees inside Lebanon had reached one million. To put this in perspective, this means that the Syrian refugees now make up one-fourth of Lebanon.

This immense strain to Lebanon's economy and security further threatens to bring the already fragile political situation to a collapse.

With Hezbollah, Iran's proxy, Syria seeks to foment turmoil and to 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.

We want to see free and fair elections this year without the influence or intimidation of Hezbollah.

There can be no democracy in Lebanon with Hezbollah being part of the government – period.

It is therefore vital for the United States to support Lebanon's security forces so they are properly equipped and trained to counter Hezbollah and other terrorist organizations, and to ensure regional stability.

This is also why it is so important to target Hezbollah's financial means and its illicit activities in order to cut off its funds.

And it's time for the European Union to finally and unanimously target and identify Hezbollah as the true entity that it is, and label it as a terrorist organization.

With these challenges ahead, we must stand with the people of Lebanon who have stood against oppression, and make clear to them that they are not alone; that we support their efforts for a free and democratic Lebanon. And we here in Congress will continue to take whatever action necessary to support that cause.