

Wednesday, April 28, 2010

Chairman Berman's opening remarks at markup of Conflict Minerals Trade Act, H.R. 4128; International Megan's Law of 2010, H.R. 5138; Global Science Program for Security, Competitiveness, and Diplomacy Act of 2010, H.R. 4801; among other bills

For more than a decade, we have been hearing about the tragic situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Mass killings of civilians. Rape used as a weapon of war. Child soldiers forced to the front lines.

HR 4128, The Conflict Minerals Act, is one important step towards ending a conflict in Congo that by some estimates has killed more than five million people.

The bill establishes a mechanism to track minerals mined in the DRC that end up in products like cell phones and laptops, and will help us cut off financing to some of planet's most brutal armed groups.

In many respects, this legislation builds on the work already begun by some American companies. H.R. 4128 will make those efforts more effective by creating a level playing field for all companies that do business in the United States.

The American people don't want to put money in the hands of brutal thugs in the DRC, and neither do American companies. For less than one cent per cell phone, this bill will allow American consumers to make responsible choices, and help put the warlords out of business. I thank the author of the bill, Mr. McDermott, and my colleague Don Payne for all their hard work on these issues, and I encourage my colleagues to support it.

I'd like to first commend Chris Smith for his hard work on H.R. 5138, the International Megan's Law of 2010. Many child sex offenders are travelling internationally or reside abroad because laws against sex acts with minors are weaker or rarely enforced in particular countries.

International Megan's Law would establish a system for providing advance notice to foreign countries when a convicted child sex offender travels to that country and imposes a registration requirement for child sex offenders from the United States who reside abroad.

Worldwide, over two million children are sexually exploited each year through trafficking, prostitution and child-sex tourism. We all know the devastating emotional, physical and psychological effects on these child victims. We need to do all we can to prevent these predators from circumventing U.S. laws to prey on children in foreign countries. I encourage my colleagues to support this bill.

H.R. 5139, Extending Immunities to the Office of the High Representative and the International Civilian Office in Kosovo Act of 2010, is a technical fix to ensure legal protection for employees of both the Office of the High Representative (OHR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the International Civilian Office (ICO) in Kosovo.

The bill, which adds the OHR and the ICO to the International Organization Immunities Act, will ensure that Americans serving in these important Balkans-based organizations will be protected from politically motivated litigation in the United States arising from their official activities.

The United States must protect its diplomats who serve in international organizations, often at great personal risk and sacrifice, from financially and personally ruinous litigation while also preserving its ability to use informal institutions in the conduct of foreign policy

Finally, we have S. 1067, the Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009. I'd like to thank the gentleman from Massachusetts, Mr. McGovern, for his hard work on the House version of this bill.

This legislation affirms the policy of the United States to work with regional governments toward a comprehensive and lasting resolution to the conflict in northern Uganda.

It further requires a strategy to support the disarmament of the Lord's Resistance Army, and support for humanitarian efforts and recovery and reconstruction in areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Southern Sudan, and the Central African Republic affected by LRA activity.

And it calls on the President to support efforts by the people of northern Uganda and the government of Uganda to promote transitional justice and reconciliation on both local and national levels.

It should be noted that this bill does not include any earmarks.

H.R. 4801 bolsters U.S. science diplomacy programs by establishing a global science program to provide grants to U.S. and foreign scientists. The bill also authorizes the science envoys program introduced by President Obama in his Cairo speech last June.

Science diplomacy – the use of scientists, engineers, and researchers to engage with their foreign counterparts – is a proven means of engaging foreign populations, improving the image of the United States, and fostering cooperation with international partners.

The amendment in the nature of a substitute addresses the concerns of the National Science Foundation and clarifies the management structure of the Global Science Program.