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Statement of Congressman John Lewis on the Introduction of the U.S. Recommitment to International Human and Civil Rights Resolution

Madam Speaker, I rise today to introduce the attached resolution that calls for the United States to ratify and implement certain fundamental international conventions.

Today, May 1st is the 201st anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. On this day, we must rededicate ourselves to the human and civil rights movement to provide freedom and equality to all people.

This resolution is very simple; it is very clear; it is very basic. Our country was founded on the principles of civil and human rights. Many, many people – men, women, and even children -- have sacrificed their lives for the freedoms we enjoy today. Countless others work tirelessly to protect these rights. On this historic day, it is important to reiterate our commitment to combat slavery, torture, racism, discrimination, and xenophobia in all forms.

It takes more than words; this effort needs action. Sixty years ago, the United Nations used our Bill of Rights as a reference in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, led the United States delegation and the United Nations (UN) in helping to draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Since that time, we've seen so many changes – a global movement towards civil and human rights. In our own country, people have sacrificed everything for key civil rights legislation like the passage of the Voting Rights Act, the Equal Pay Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

But Madam Speaker, somehow along the way, we've pulled away from a global movement that requires constant work, constant attention, and constant action. The U.S. must catch up with so many of our global partners.

How can we combat genocide in Darfur, if we ourselves have not ratified the UN Conventions that address the rights of women, children, and forced disappearance. How can we ask for our global trading partners to respect international labor standards, when we ourselves have not ratified ILO standards on the right to organize and bargain collectively, or forced child labor, or age discrimination? It is important to not only speak as global leader, but act as a global leader on key human and civil rights issues.

On this little piece of real estate that we call Earth, we all have our duty to make this world a little cleaner, a little better, and a little safer. This resolution, Madam Speaker, is about common sense, and I hope all of my colleagues will join me as cosponsors. Thank you.