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STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN JOHN LEWIS (D-GA) ON HOUSE CONSIDERATION
OF H.R. 923, THE EMMETT UNSOLVED CIVIL RIGHTS CRIME ACT OF 2007

June 20, 2007

Mr. LEWIS OF Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my good friend, the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, (Mr. *Conyers*) for those kind words.

Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act is being considered today before the full House of Representatives.

I would like to thank the lead cosponsor of this bill, my good friend, Representative *Kenny Hulshof* from Missouri, and my good friends in the United States Senate, Senator *Chris Dodd* of Connecticut, and Senator *Patrick Leahy* of Vermont for their distinguished support in this effort.

Again, I must thank Chairman *Conyers* for all of his help and for all of his support in bringing this bill before us today. Also, Subcommittee Chairs *Scott* and *Nadler* for coordinating a powerful hearing on this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the time has come for the sake of history, for the sake of justice, for the sake of closure, the 110th Congress must pass this legislation.

On August 28, 1955, almost 52 years ago, a 14-year-old boy from Chicago, a young African American boy, was visiting his uncle in Money, Mississippi. He was pulled from his bed in the darkness of night. He was beaten until he could hardly be recognized. He was shot in the head, and his body was dumped in the Tallahatchie River, all because somebody said he had been fresh with a white woman.

Several years later, an intelligent and dignified NACP leader named Medgar Evers was gunned down in front of his home in Mississippi in June of 1963. Some historians said it

was the injustice of these unsolved two murders that began the mass movement in the American South that we call the modern-day civil rights movement.

Who can forget the NAACP leader and his wife, Harry and Harriette Moore, who were killed by a bomb on Christmas night as they celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary in 1951 in Florida? Who can forget the two black couples lynched about 60 miles east of Atlanta in 1946, or the death of Lemuel Penn, a lieutenant colonel in the United States Army Reserve from Washington, D.C., who was a veteran trying to get home from Fort Benning, Georgia for a little rest. He was killed in 1964 as members of the KKK drove by him on a highway.

Who can forget Viola Liuzzo, shot down in Alabama in 1965, from the hometown of our chairman, Chairman *Conyers* from Detroit, trying to bring nonviolent activists back to their home after the Selma-to-Montgomery march?

There are hundreds, maybe even thousands, of these crimes that were never brought to justice. There are murderers who have walked free for decades while the families of victims cry out for justice. Passing this bill is the least we can do. And we must do something to right these wrongs.

I will never forget the three civil rights workers, three young men I knew, Andy Goodman, James Chaney and Mickey Schwerner. They came to Mississippi with a simple mission, to register as many black voters as possible. They were stopped, arrested, taken to jail. Later that night, June 21, 1964, they were taken from jail by the sheriff and his deputy, turned over to the Klan, where they were beaten, shot and killed. They didn't die in Vietnam. They didn't die in Eastern Europe. They died right here in the United States. They died in Philadelphia, Mississippi.

Viola Liuzzo didn't die on a road or some street in Baghdad, she died right there in Alabama on Highway 80. Lemuel Penn, Medgar Evers, Emmett Till and countless others didn't die in the Middle East; they died right here in our own country fighting for simple justice.

Mr. Speaker, we have an obligation, we have a mission, we have a mandate. The blood of hundreds of innocent men and women is calling out to us. Then, no one came to their aid. But today we can help make it right. Let us move to close this dark chapter in our history. Let us try to wash away the stains on our democracy. So I call on all of my colleagues to pass this legislation and pass it today.

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