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House of Representatives

HONORING THE IDEALS AND DREAMS OF MARLA BENNETT

HON. BOB FILNER
OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MR. FILNER: Mr. Speaker, in a region that has been racked with violence and acts of terror, the vicious bombing that took place on July 31, 2002 at Hebrew University stands out as a particularly heinous crime. This is a university that prides itself on its diversity, especially its ability to integrate students and faculty regardless of their ethnic or religious background. It is the oldest university in Israel and has established itself as one of the outstanding universities in the world, one that has gained renown for the quality of its students, teachers and researchers.

I feel compelled to comment on this attack for many reasons, not the least of which is that it hit my community, my Congressional district and my friends so personally. The bomb that was detonated in Hebrew University's Frank Sinatra International Student Center cafeteria killed nine young people, including five Americans. Over eighty were injured. Marla Bennett, of San Diego, California, was one of the Americans killed in this senseless assault. Marla was only 24 when her life was taken. She had graduated in 2000 at the top of her class with a B.A. in Political Science from the University of California at Berkeley. At the time of her death, she was studying for her M.A. in Jewish Education at Hebrew University's Rothberg International School's Division of Graduate Studies. She was also jointly

enrolled at the Pardes Institute for Jewish Studies. Her ambition was to be a teacher.

Marla was not new to Israel, nor even to the Hebrew University. She spent her junior year in college attending the Rothberg International School's One Year Program.

She had lived in Israel for a year, during which time she sent home frequent letters brimming with idealism, especially in her ardent belief in Israeli-Palestinian peace. Last May, she wrote that ``At least if I am here I can take an active role in attempting to put back together all that has broken. I can volunteer in the homes of Israelis affected by terrorism, I can put food in collection baskets for Palestinian families.``

Bennett, whose exams were over, had a flight back to San Diego that was scheduled to leave only hours after the time of the attack.

Marla Bennett symbolized the goals and objectives of the university she grew to love. She symbolized the striving for academic excellence as well as the search for cooperation and peace that has typified this university since it opened its doors in the mid-1920's.

The University's President, Menachem Magidor, summarized this when he wrote in a letter to the New York Times that this was ``an attack on understanding, tolerance and the quest for peace. [It]

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is a crime not only against Israel or the Jewish people, it is a crime against the free and enlightened world."

In the wake of this tragedy, President Magidor asked "whether it still makes sense to strive for a peaceful society based on reason and understanding." He concluded that "the answer came to me clearly, and it is summarized by the Hebrew word 'davka'- 'despite everything.' We must not let them kill our drive of peace."

In this spirit, it is important to stress that Hebrew University is continuing its fine academic traditions. Its researchers and scientists are continuing their cutting edge work on projects that are designed to benefit all peoples. It is not surprising that Hebrew University's scientists apply for and receive so many grants from American government agencies including USAID, NIST, NIH and DARPA. Many of these projects are done in cooperation with American universities and research centers. Other Members of Congress have complimented the high quality of research done at Hebrew University and I join in their commendations.

Rather than go through a long litany of all of these projects, especially those that have an Israeli, Palestinian and American component, it might be useful to mention just one as typical of the ethos of this special university.

The Kuvin Center for the Study of Infectious and Tropical Diseases functions within the University's Medical School, which is a world class institution established over 75 years ago. The Kuvin Center has been a leader in infectious disease and parasitological research for over 30 years. Its researchers and physicians have published extensively in the professional literature and it has trained many active scientists in the field. For a number of years, the Kuvin Center has collaborated with Al-Quds University Medical School on a variety of scientific and medical projects. Al-Quds, the pre-eminent university in the West Bank, is located in Abudies, which is near Jerusalem and close to Palestinian hospitals, clinics and laboratories.

The two institutions are now proposing a joint project for "Regional Cooperation on Infectious Diseases" that will cover the study and control of diarrheal and respiratory diseases, brucellosis, tuberculosis, viral hepatitis, HIV infections and zoonotic diseases such as leishmaniasis, and rabies. Preventing and treating these diseases are of enormous importance to the welfare of the region as a whole.

The Congress fully recognizes and supports these types of cooperative Israeli-Palestinian health initiatives.

The Foreign Operations bill for Fiscal Year 2003, which has passed through the Appropriations Committee, includes language on the Kuvin Center/Al Quds cooperation. I am pleased that the Committee included the following paragraph in the report accompanying this bill:

The Committee acknowledges that one of the primary objectives of the West Bank and Gaza program is to create viable infrastructure in Palestinian Authority-controlled areas to ensure the health and welfare of the Palestinian people. Al Quds University, in cooperation with the Kuvin Center for Infectious Diseases of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, has proposed the establishment of a regional health and disease program, which would work to build an effective infrastructure to deal with serious health and disease problems among the Palestinian people. The Committee understands that cooperative programs of this nature are rare in the current environment, and urges AID to work, through the West Bank and Gaza program, to help Al Quds and the Kuvin Center begin this initiative.

This project is designed to enable the United States to provide \$15 million over five years to this cooperative effort to deal with infectious diseases. This program does not require any additional appropriations. The proposed expenditure of these funds is an indication of Congressional intent on just how American money that has already been allocated can best be used in a productive capacity for Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. Thus, the Kuvin Center-Hebrew University/Al Quds University cooperative effort will serve as a model of how the United States, Israel and the Palestinians can work together on projects that will benefit the entire region.

While Marla Bennett and the four other Americans who were killed, together with four Israelis, cannot ever come back to life, it is important to preserve their memory by continuing with projects such as this one. It is the very least we can do for them, for their ideals and for their dreams. Even more important, it will serve as a step toward a better future for the entire region.