

2/20/96  
RAMADAN RECEPTION

PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

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**REMARKS BY FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON  
AT THE RAMADAN RECEPTION  
THE WHITE HOUSE**

MRS. CLINTON: Eid Mubarak. I want to welcome you all to the White House as you and Muslims all over the world celebrate the end of Ramadan. I am honored so many of you could take the time to share part of this holy month with us here.

This is a historic occasion -- the first Eid celebration ever at the White House. It is only fitting that, just as children and families of other faiths come here to celebrate some of their holy days, so you, too, are all here to mark this important Islamic tradition.

This celebration is an American event. We are a nation of immigrants who have long drawn on our diverse religious traditions and faiths for the strength and courage that make America great. For two centuries, we have prided ourselves on being a nation of pluralistic beliefs, united by a common faith in democracy.

As the fastest growing religion in this country, Islam will only continue to enrich our people and our society. And a greater understanding of the tenets of Islam in our national consciousness will help us build strength and resilience as a nation. That is why the President and I believe this is such an historic -- and overdue -- occasion.

Like many Americans, I have only recently gained a full appreciation of Islam. When I was growing up, there were no courses in Islamic history or religion in my schools and the Koran was not on too many bookshelves in American households.

Fortunately, that has changed, as I know from my own family experience. I have to admit that a good deal of what my husband and I have learned has come from my daughter, who some of you who are our friends know took a course last year in Islamic history. When she and I traveled to South Asia, she provided me with a running commentary on everything we saw and visited.

There we met many Muslim families, some of whom were struggling to make ends meet. But despite their material poverty, the richness of their spiritual devotion -- their faith was overwhelming. Their commitment to their families was impressive.

Last night you ended 30 days of fasting and prayer. During this month of self-denial, you have each striven to become wealthier in spirit, to strengthen your commitment to God, to develop greater compassion for the poor, and to nurture your family relationships. The values which lie at the heart of Ramadan -- of faith, family, community, and responsibility for the less fortunate -- resonate with all the peoples of this earth. They are universal values.

But in this era of change, this age of endless possibility and great uncertainty, it is easy to forget our common priorities and shared values, and instead to dwell on our divisions.

No matter what religion we follow, we must not allow extremists of any faith to manipulate the priorities and values of the majority of that religion's followers. We have seen what tragedies can happen when religion, whether it is Christianity, Judaism, or Islam, is exploited for political gain. If we employ religion as an excuse for intolerance, divisiveness, or violence, we betray its purpose.

Since coming to the White House, I have been privileged to meet some of our world's great religious leaders, among them Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Buddhists. And, despite their profound differences, each speaks from a deep wellspring of love that affirms life and yearns for men and women to open their hearts like children to God and to one another.

So, on this day, I encourage all of us to continue reaching out to both neighbors and strangers to help each other appreciate our faiths and to seek to understand the faiths of one another.

Here in America, it is gratifying to see the great contributions that Muslims have made and are making to this nation. Ramadan celebrates the time centuries ago when the prophet Mohammed received the Koran from God. The Koran has touched and enlightened billions, including my own family. And as I learn more about Islam and about all the great religions, I am struck by the remarkable similarities among them. We know that we have so much more in common than what divides us if we seek to celebrate that.

May peace be with all of us, and may God grant us health and prosperity now and in the years ahead.

I'd like introduce some special guests who will take a few minutes to share their thoughts and prayers with us.

The first who will address us is a young woman, Marwa Al-Khairo, age 11, who will tell us about the meaning of Ramadan.

She will be followed by Chaplain Muhammad, the first Islamic chaplain to serve the United States military, who will offer a prayer.

And Mr. Khaled Saffuri, the assistant director of the American Muslim Council, which is sponsoring this reception, will bring our program to a close.

I also want to thank two dear friends of ours, Mr. Rashid Chaudary and Kamran Khan for all their help on this occasion.

Now it gives me great pleasure to introduce Marwa to you.

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