

RAMADAN REMARKS

As Prepared

Remarks of First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
On the Celebration of Ramadan
January 29, 1998

Eid Mubarak and welcome to the White House. Before I begin, I want to acknowledge Doris Matsui; Dr. Laila al-Maryati, who I had the pleasure of working alongside at the Beijing Conference, and the entire Muslim Women's League; Laila's husband Salam and Dr. Hassan Hathout of the Muslim Public Affairs Council; and, of course Lena -- thank you for sharing with us what fasting means to you...not just the willpower to resist the cupcake and cookie, though that is no small feat, but the will to honor God and family and those too often left behind.

Just two years ago, we gathered in this very room for the first Ramadan celebration ever held at the White House. Today, I am pleased to once again join so many families and children from around the country as you celebrate the end of this holy month.

All over the world, people are coming together as you have. Praying. Rejoicing. Honoring family and community. Renewing the spirit. And rededicating themselves to the values that bind you as Muslims and connect us all as human beings.

When I was growing up, classes about Islamic history and copies of the Koran in American homes were few and far between. Much of what my husband and I have learned about Islam's history has come from our daughter, who took an Islamic history class in high school. It's come from our colleagues -- two of whom, Mona Mohib and Huma Abedin -- helped put together this event. And it's come from the Muslim citizens I've met here and around the world who have shown how the values you celebrate today are passed down everyday -- from the heart and soul of one generation to the next.

When I was in Uzbekistan a few months ago, I visited awe-inspiring mosques and madrassas, sacred places of worship and learning, kept alive -- and now restored -- despite years of turmoil and oppression. I was struck by their ability not only to maintain a strong identity, but also to co-exist peacefully within one community. In cities like Bukhara and Samarkand, I saw Muslims, Christians, and Jews following their faiths in the same neighborhoods -- as they have done for centuries.

This diversity has always been America's greatest blessing -- and our greatest challenge. We are a nation of immigrants, strengthened by many faiths, yet united by a common faith in democracy. We see this rich heritage in the foods we eat, the clothes we wear, the music we listen to, and the languages and accents we hear as we walk down the street. During this month of self-denial, you have grown stronger in spirit, stronger in compassion for the poor, stronger in your commitment to family. These are your values -- and they are universal values.

As we enter the new millennium, we must never lose sight of them. It's too easy sometimes to focus on what drives us apart, instead of what brings us together. We have seen what happens when we betray the purpose of religion by using it as an excuse for intolerance, divisiveness, violence, and hatred.

If there is anything we've learned in the last century, it's that when the dignity of one of us is compromised, the dignity of all of us is compromised. Whether it's the bombing of a black church, the painting of swastikas on a synagogue, or the recent defacement of the Crescent and Star on the Mall, when hate crimes plague one of us, they plague all of us. And they must be answered by all of us.

The Koran teaches that Islam is a commitment to live in peace. That is what we all want. Peace. That is what we must always pursue in our own homes and communities and across the world. In Northern Ireland, in Bosnia, and, especially today, in the Middle East.

We are all on this earth to learn from one another. Much of the world looks to us to see if it can be done. Can we enter the next century with Christians, Muslims, and Jews living in harmony? With citizens of every race and ethnicity walking side by side, stronger together than apart? Can we enter a new century with Lena and all of God's children able to fulfill their God-given promise?

I believe we will...If we continue to dedicate ourselves to our families, our community, to each other-- to that which we celebrate today.

As-Salaamu Alaikum. May peace be with you and may God grant you health and prosperity now and in the years ahead.