

Eid/Ramadan Event  
The White House  
January 21, 1999

PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION

**Eid Al-Fitr Celebration**  
**Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton**

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Eid Mubarak! And welcome to the White House. This is the third time I have had the pleasure and honor of hosting this Eid celebration, and I'm pleased to see so many families and children from around our country who have joined us here today.

We have also been joined by a number of distinguished and honorable visitors. There are just a few that I'd like to acknowledge: Ambassador Ronald Newman, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Middle East; Hassan Nemazee, U.S. Ambassador Designate to Argentina; and Robert Seiple, nominated as Ambassador At-Large for International Religious Freedom [at the State Department].

It is indeed an honor for us to welcome you back. I know that over the past two days you have been congregating at each other's homes, at mosques, and at community centers celebrating the month of abstinence and fasting and prayer and rejoicing together. So it is a special treat for me to have you here and to know that this is an extraordinary time of gathering and recollection and rejoicing.

I want to thank everyone who has worked on bringing this event together. We have had a wonderful turnout in the past. We had more people this time, so we are actually occupying two rooms here in the Old Executive Office Building. Sharifa Alkhateeb of the North American Council for Muslim Women has been largely responsible for working with the White House staff in bringing us here. As many of you may know, Sharifa was the chair of the Muslim Caucus in Beijing in 1995. And she is also a great friend to me and to my staff for many, many occasions when we call upon her for advice and counsel. And I am pleased that once again she could be so helpful, both on her own behalf and on behalf of the Council in helping us out here.

I know we are also looking forward to hearing from a young man who will share his perspective and experiences as a young American Muslim. And Omar will have more to say about that in a minute. I also want to welcome Professor Sayyid Hossein Nasr, who will speak to us as well. Now there are many people who have made today happen, but special thanks are due to Maureen Shea, Mona Mohib and Huma Abedin for putting together this event.

I must say that I have seen very personally the impact of Ramadan because of having Huma on my staff, and have had many occasions to talk with her about the particular meaning of Ramadan. But I also feel so grateful that I am able to travel both on my own and with my

husband on behalf of the United States to many parts of the world and speak with many different Muslims and learn more about Islam.

It was just a few short weeks ago, as many of you know, that the President and I traveled to Gaza. I was very pleased to be part of that historic visit, the first by an American president to the Palestinian Authority.

We happened to be there only a few days before Ramadan began, and there was a lot of anticipation and excitement in preparation. I had the opportunity to visit one of the refugee camps -- the Beach Camp -- and I was able to see firsthand many of the difficulties that the Palestinian people are encountering in everyday life.

But I also -- through my conversations, particularly with the women there -- I saw something else as well. I saw women working very hard to build their own lives, to start businesses, to learn about their legal rights, to look for better ways to educate their children, and to participate fully in the life of their communities.

With Suma Arafat (phonetic), I also visited a facility that she has started for children with various kinds of disabilities. And again I could see firsthand work that was taking place to give every child an opportunity to live up to the fullest of his or her God-given potential. Although the people that I saw know that they have quite a road to walk together to build a very strong future for themselves, I did feel -- and I believe that we could see in their faces -- the courage and determination to do just that. And there is something very special about the time that Ramadan provides to contemplate and meditate and pray and think about what we could all do better on our own behalf, on behalf of our families and our communities to build that better future.

From Turkey to Bosnia to Uzbekistan to Africa, I've met with families, women and children, and talked about lives and futures. And I know how important it is that we do more here in the United States to highlight the contributions of Muslim Americans to our great efforts here in this country to prepare ourselves for a future that is truly the best that we could offer to our children and our grandchildren.

I was struck when I visited outside of Jerusalem a village that was started by Arab Muslims, Jews and Christians. A village some of you have heard of, maybe even visited -- Neve Shalom -- founded by people who wanted to do the hardest work there is. Not making speeches about tolerance and diversity, but working and living together, understanding and discovering what unites us as human beings across all of what I would argue are often arbitrary lines that divide us.

I watched as three young children -- in a kindergarten class of that village -- came forward together to celebrate their individual religious traditions. One lighted a menorah, one a Christmas tree; one a Ramadan lantern. None felt that they had to make any argument or case

for following their own religious traditions and beliefs. But each felt respected and validated for what they believed and what their families taught them. I used to feel so strongly as a young girl, and now I feel even more strongly that religion should not serve as a weapon of war and division but as a bridge to peace. That children should learn to respect their own traditions, but also understand the traditions of others.

Today, we celebrate Eid with special foods and exchanging of gifts, and by honoring the remarkable contributions of Islam that have enabled millions and millions of Muslims around the world to endure and thrive through the ages and enrich us all.

We also honor the universal values that are embodied in Islam -- love of family and community; mutual respect; the power of education; and the deepest yearning of all: to live in peace. Values that can bring people of every faith and culture together, strengthen us as people, and , I would argue, strengthen the United States as a nation.

I have been told that a common Muslim prayer tells us: "No struggle is easy unless you make it easy for us. And only you, my Lord, can make a hardship easy to overcome." With God's help, and with the kind of determination, courage, and hope that is lived out in the lives of all of you and millions of others around our country and throughout the world, I believe that we can do more together to help build a more peaceful, prosperous, and hopeful future in which all of God's children can live in peace and fulfill their God-given promise.

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

Certainly one of the great reasons for any religious tradition is to bring up our children in the way that we would want them to follow, to give them both roots and wings, to enable them to understand where they came from but to equip them to know and see where they are going. We have with us a young man, a senior at Woodson High School, Omar Farou (phonetic), who will be able to talk with us about a young person's experience of Ramadan. And I invite him now to the podium. Come and join us please, Omar.