

Remarks at the Iftar Dinner

August 10, 2011

Good evening, everyone, and welcome to the White House. Tonight is part of a rich tradition here at the White House of celebrating the holy days of many faiths and the diversity that define us as a nation. So these are quintessentially American celebrations: people of different faiths coming together, with humility before our Maker, to reaffirm our obligations to one another. Because no matter who we are or how we pray, we're all children of a loving God.

Now, this year, Ramadan is entirely in August. That means the days are long, the weather is hot, and you are hungry. *[Laughter]* So I will be brief.

I want to welcome the members of the diplomatic corps who are here; the Members of Congress, including two Muslim American Members of Congress, Keith Ellison and Andre Carson; and leaders and officials from across my administration. Thank you all for being here. Please give them a big round of applause.

To the millions of Muslim Americans across the United States and more—the more than 1 billion Muslims around the world, Ramadan is a time of reflection and a time of devotion. It's an occasion to join with family and friends in celebration of a faith known for its diversity and a commitment to justice and the dignity of all human beings. So to you and your families, *Ramadan Kareem*.

Now, this evening reminds us of both the timeless teachings of a great religion and the enduring strengths of a great nation. Like so many faiths, Islam has always been part of our American family, and Muslim Americans have long contributed to the strength and character of our country, in all walks of life. This has been especially true over the past 10 years.

In 1 month, we will mark the 10th anniversary of those awful attacks that brought so much pain to our hearts. It will be the time to honor all those that we've lost, the families who carry on their legacy, the heroes who rushed to help that day and all who have served to keep us safe during a difficult decade. And tonight it's worth remembering that these Americans were of many faiths and backgrounds, including proud and patriotic Muslim Americans.

Muslim Americans were innocent passengers on those planes, including a young married couple looking forward to the birth of their first child. They were workers in the Twin Towers, Americans by birth and Americans by choice, immigrants who crossed the oceans to give their children a better life. They were cooks and waiters, but also analysts and executives.

There, in the Towers where they worked, they came together for daily prayers and meals at iftar. They were looking to the future: getting married, sending their kids to college, enjoying a well-deserved retirement. And they were taken from us much too soon. Today, they live on in the love of their families and the Nation that will never forget. And tonight we're deeply humbled to be joined by some of these 9/11 families, and I would ask them to stand and be recognized, please.

Muslim Americans were first-responders: the former police cadet who raced to the scene to help and then was lost when the towers collapsed around him, the EMTs who evacuated so many to safety, the nurse who tended to so many victims, the naval officer at the Pentagon who

rushed into the flames and pulled the injured to safety. On this 10th anniversary, we honor these men and women for what they are: American heroes.

Nor let us forget that every day for these past 10 years Muslim Americans have helped to protect our communities as police and firefighters, including some who join us tonight. Across our Federal Government, they keep our homeland secure, they guide our intelligence and counterterrorism efforts, and they uphold the civil rights and civil liberties of all Americans. So make no mistake, Muslim Americans help to keep us safe.

We see this in the brave service of our men and women in uniform, including thousands of Muslim Americans. In a time of war, they volunteered, knowing they could be sent into harm's way. Our troops come from every corner of our country, with different backgrounds and different beliefs, but every day they come together and succeed together, as one American team.

During the 10 hard years of war, our troops have served with excellence and with honor. Some have made the ultimate sacrifice, among them Army Specialist Kareem Khan. Galvanized by 9/11 to serve his country, he gave his life in Iraq and now rests with his fellow heroes at Arlington. And we thank Kareem's mother Elsheba for being here again tonight. Like Kareem, this generation has earned its place in history, and I would ask all of our servicemembers here tonight, members of the 9/11 generation, to stand and accept the thanks of our fellow Americans.

This year and every year, we must ask ourselves: How do we honor these patriots, those who died and those who served? In this season of remembrance, the answer is the same as it was 10 Septembers ago. We must be the America they lived for and the America they died for, the America they sacrificed for.

An America that doesn't simply tolerate people of different backgrounds and beliefs, but an America where we are enriched by our diversity. An America where we treat one another with respect and with dignity, remembering that here in the United States there is no "them" or "us," it's just "us." An America where our fundamental freedoms and inalienable rights are not simply preserved, but continually renewed and refreshed, among them the right of every person to worship as they choose. An America that stands up for dignity and the rights of people around the world, whether a young person demanding his or her freedom in the Middle East or North Africa or a hungry child in the Horn of Africa, where we are working to save lives.

Put simply, we must be the America that goes forward as one family, like generations before us, pulling together in times of trial, staying true to our core values, and emerging even stronger. This is who we are, and this is who we must always be.

And tonight, as we near a solemn anniversary, I cannot imagine a more fitting wish for our Nation. So God bless you all, and God bless the United States of America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:35 p.m. in the East Room at the White House.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Iftar dinner.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Carson, Andre; Ellison, Keith; Khan, Elsheba.

Subjects: Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Africa : East Africa, famine and humanitarian crisis; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Casualties; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Muslim American servicemembers; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Civil rights : Freedom of religion; Holiday and special observances : Ramadan; Holidays and special observances : Ramadan; Holidays and special occasions : Ramadan ; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Casualties; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Middle East : Democracy efforts; North Africa : Democracy efforts; Terrorism : September 11, 2001, attacks; Virginia : Arlington National Cemetery.

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