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**REMARKS
BY
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ON THE OCCASION OF OFFICIAL U.S. EMBASSY IFTAR
AND DINNER
CHIEF OF MISSIONS RESIDENCE, DHAKA
June12, 2016**

Assalamu alaikum. Shubo shonda. Ramadan Mubarak.

Welcome everyone and thank you for joining us tonight. I am delighted to share this Iftar with you.

As Muslims across the world come together this month to reflect upon the responsibility that human beings have to God and to one another. Ramadan is a blessed time; a time to strengthen ties with families and friends and make peace with those who have wronged us. It is a time for helping and protecting those in need, regardless of their beliefs or backgrounds, and a time to reflect on our common humanity.

As we reflect on the values that Ramadan embodies, I am struck by how embedded those values are in the daily lives of Bangladeshis. Compassion, charity, and commitment; these are more than abstract notions for the wonderful people I have met here. They are deeply held beliefs that are put into practice every day. They transcend the boundaries of religious community or ethnic heritage. These beliefs are the reason that Bangladesh continues to provide a shining example of how its traditions of tolerance and communal harmony help contribute to the advancement of all its citizens.

In America, Muslims mark Ramadan by joining their fellow citizens to serve the less fortunate and to host interfaith activities that build mutual understanding in their communities. And each year, the United States President organizes an annual White House Iftar and honors the contributions of outstanding American Muslims.

Like Bangladesh, the United States is a nation of many religions which has made a foundational commitment to not just a tolerance of, but also an embracing of all faiths.

It has been almost a year since many of us gathered here to share an iftar and dinner. It has been a long and sad year in too many ways. Hateful speech, violent and extremist attacks and the displacement of too many people have all been the result of a growing intolerance in this world.

It is, therefore, more important than ever that we nurture peace, communication and understanding between people of all religions, both within our two countries and between the nations. And we are blessed in this endeavor, because the basis for that peace and understanding already exists in the founding principles of faiths found the world over: love of God, and love of neighbor.

The core of both our faiths, as expressed in their sacred texts, supports this message of peace and brotherly love. The Koran tells us that “God created us of a male and a female and made us nations and communities to better know each other.” Similarly, the Bible teaches us: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Tonight, let me end my quoting from a eulogy offered by a Jewish comedian and actor – Billy Crystal – to his lifelong Muslim friend – professional boxer and athlete (and honorary citizen of Bangladesh!) – Muhammad Ali. Their friendship was born by chance, but it was legendary; forged in ever growing mutual respect as they both worked to advance the cause of peace.

Crystal likened Ali to “a tremendous bolt of lightning, created by mother nature out of thin air, a fantastic combination of power and beauty.”

He went on to note that, “at the moment of impact, it lights up everything around it, so you can see everything clearly.”

“Muhammad Ali struck us in the middle of America's darkest night, in the heart of its most threatening gathering storm,” Crystal said.

“His power toppled the mightiest of foes, and his intense light shined on America and we were able to see clearly injustice, inequality, poverty, pride, self-realization, courage, laughter, love, joy and religious freedom for all.

Ali forced us to take a look at ourselves. This brash young man who thrilled us, angered us, confused, and challenged us, ultimately became a silent messenger of peace who taught us that life is best when you build bridges between people, not walls.”

In the spirit of Ramadan, let us embrace the concepts of peace, unity, and brotherhood; and all take a clear look at what we must do to bring these things to our precious world.

Ramadan Mubarak.

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GR/ 2016

**As prepared for delivery*